



Recontextualizing Early f Figures: Rbi'a al-'Adawiyya and Dh'n-Nn

Item type	text; Electronic Thesis
Authors	Cook, Rachel Nelle
Publisher	The University of Arizona.
Rights	Copyright © is held by the author. Digital access to this material is made possible by the University Libraries, University of Arizona. Further transmission, reproduction or presentation (such as public display or performance) of protected items is prohibited except with permission of the author.
Downloaded	17-Oct-2017 12:15:21
Link to item	http://hdl.handle.net/10150/560831

Recontextualizing Early Ṣūfī Figures: Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya and Dhū’n-Nūn

by

Nelle Cook

Copyright © Nelle Cook 2015

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the

SCHOOL OF MIDDLE EASTERN & NORTH AFRICAN STUDIES

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Graduate College

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

2015

STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

This thesis has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced degree at the University of Arizona and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided that that an accurate acknowledgement of the source is made. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this manuscript in whole or in part may be granted by the copyright holder.

SIGNED: Nelle Cook

APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

_____	May 8th, 2015 _____
Scott Lucas	Date
Professor of Islamic Studies	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my great appreciation to Dr. Lucas, my committee chair, Dr. Darling, and Dr. Noorani for their patient guidance throughout the the development of this research. Our discussions challenged my thinking and helped me weave together multiple approaches as I worked with the source material.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr. Burton, whose instruction at Truman State University gave me the foundation and the confidence to succeed in later scholastic endeavors. Additionally, I would like to thank my friend and colleague Marie Donovan for her support throughout this experience.

Finally, I would like to thank my mother and father. Your encouragement has kept me grounded through my entire academic career. This work is yours as much as it is mine.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	5
INTRODUCTION.....	6
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.....	17
<i>On Intimacy</i>	20
SULAMĪ'S DHIKR: FEMININITY THROUGH SERVITUDE.....	25
<i>Rābi 'a in Sulamī's Dhikr</i>	30
<i>Dhū 'n-Nūn in Sulamī's Ṭabaqāt</i>	33
QUSHAYRĪ'S RISĀLA.....	39
<i>Rābi 'a in the Risāla</i>	45
<i>Dhū 'n-Nūn in the Risāla</i>	49
'AṬṬĀR'S TADHIRAT AL-AWLIYĀ'.....	58
<i>Rābi 'a in the Tadhkirat: A shift toward gender</i>	61
<i>Ma 'rifa: A Major Theme in 'Aṭṭār's Depiction of Rābi 'a</i>	68
<i>Dhū 'n-Nūn in the Tadhkirat</i>	71
<i>Dhū 'n-Nūn and Rābi 'a: A Comparison</i>	76
CONCLUSION.....	86
<i>Genre and Early Sufism</i>	89
WORKS CITED.....	91

Abstract

Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya and Dhū’n-Nūn are among the founding saints in the Ṣūfī tradition; however, these figures are more legend than fact. Their narratives in Western scholarship have been constructed from numerous sources, a process which has stripped them of their original contexts. This work addresses this issue by examining these characters’ stories in the context of three of the major works containing collections of their stories: Sulamī’s *Dhikr* and *Ṭabaqāt*, Qushayrī’s *Risala*, and ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat*, in order to see which themes the original compilers of these stories emphasized. This approach will demonstrate that these authors were primarily focused on two issues in these works: the role of gender in the practitioner’s relationship with God, and the problem of how to discuss advanced states along the Ṣūfī path such that they do not distract novice Ṣūfīs lacking the spiritual maturity to handle these stages. Recontextualizing these stories in this way opens the door to further questions regarding the way that Western scholars approach the stories of other Ṣūfī saints and the history of early Sufism as a whole.

Introduction

When Western scholarship approaches the history and evolution of Sufism, it tends to identify the early Ṣūfīs as the founders of Sufism's ideology, including such figures as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, al-Junayd, al-Ḥallāj, Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya, and Dhū'n-Nūn. The understanding of these figures in Western scholarship has been constructed from numerous collections of Ṣūfī hagiographies. In many cases, these constructions lead to the decontextualization of these characters, resulting in a loss of many key elements present in their individual works. This problem is especially apparent in the narratives of Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya (d. 801) and Dhū'n-Nūn (d. 861), whose Western characterizations misconstrue two main elements of their stories: their status as minority figures and the fact that their importance stems from their miraculously intimate relationship with God. The most important early biographers who compiled stories about Rābi'a and Dhū'n-Nūn were Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Sulamī (d. 1021), Abū 'l-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin al-Qushayrī (d. 1072), and Farīd ad-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Aṭṭār (d. 1221), whose interpretations of these characters were impacted by several themes. By placing Rābi'a and Dhū'n-Nūn back in the context of the works in which they are discussed, we can identify the issues which the compilers highlighted in their portrayals of these characters. First, there is the issue of being a member of a marginalized group and the potential impact of marginalization in the development of a relationship with God; and second is the question of how to balance the need of creating a firm foundation in the Sunna while simultaneously addressing more advanced, controversial stages along the Ṣūfī path.

The problem of decontextualizing the early Ṣūfī figures stems from the absence of source material concurrent with these figures' lives. Western scholarship regarding these figures must

rely on merging together numerous Ṣūfī biographies on each saint, all of which were written after the saints lived, and are the products of different times and geographic regions than the other works with which they are blended. After combining the portrayals of these figures, Western scholars forward these constructions as being accurate biographies of these saints' lives. In Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya's case, this approach was solidified by Margaret Smith,¹ who is credited with producing the first English-language biography on Rābi'a, since used as a source in almost all subsequent Western scholarship. While many scholars acknowledge that there are problems with discussing the early Ṣūfīs, particularly Rābi'a, in this way, they all utilize this methodology and provide the same basic narrative of their lives and accomplishments.

Generally speaking, this narrative is represented as follows. Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya lived in Baṣra and belonged to a pious family who died shortly after her birth. She was then sold into slavery, but she was freed shortly thereafter because of her devotion to God. This devotion to God, commonly discussed as unified love for God, is widely viewed as being Rābi'a's primary contribution to Sufism. This idea maintains that true love for God is all-consuming, and there is no space for loving anything else, including worldly possessions, other people, or even one's self. Taken to its fullest extreme, true love for God requires complete devotion such that the lover ceases to be aware of anything except for Him. As a result of this idea, Rābi'a's life is depicted as one of extreme asceticism. Rābi'a spent most of her time fasting, praying, and contemplating God. She is particularly famous for never marrying, and for her refusal to own worldly goods. She also is depicted as never having received an education, and instead it is her

¹ Another important source on Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya is 'Abdur Rahman Badawi, *Shahidat al-'ishq al-ilahi, Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya* (Kuwait, Wikālāt al-Matbū'āt). Unfortunately, this work has not yet been translated into English, and so is underutilized in Western scholarship.

extreme reliance on God that brought her along the path. Her exact death date is unknown, some sources saying that she died in 801, and some saying that she died in 832.

Dhū'n-Nūn's narrative has not received the same level of interest in the West as that of Rābi'a. However, like Rābi'a, Dhū'n-Nūn has been constructed from numerous Ṣūfī hagiographies, including Sulamī's *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*, and Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī's *Hilyat al-awliyā'*.² As such, Western scholars take a similar approach to Dhū'n-Nūn's characters as that of Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya. According to this narrative, Dhū'n-Nūn's father was a Nubian, meaning that he lived near the Nile River, in the area of southern Egypt and north Sudan, and Dhū'n-Nūn was a freed slave. He is known for studying medicine, alchemy, and magic, and is especially known for angering the Mu'tazila due to his belief that the Qur'ān was uncreated. This belief resulted in his being imprisoned in Baghdad and being released by the order of the caliph Mutawakkil.³ During his life, Dhū'n-Nūn is noted as having been a teacher with many disciples. He was the first to teach on the true nature of *ma'rifa* (gnosis), particularly emphasizing the need to overcome the self in order to make spiritual progress along the path to God. These themes are closely related to those espoused by Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya, implying that the difference in Western interest in the two characters is due to their difference in gender, rather than thematic differences in their narratives.

The closeness of these themes also reveals the shortcomings of approaching these characters historically, rather than treating them as literary figures, as it has led scholars to omit

² Scholars who have pieced these works together include Annemarie Schimmel and Alexander Knysh.

³ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 42.

each of these figures from the other's narrative.⁴ This omission is sensible from a historical perspective because there is no evidence that Rābi'a and Dhū'n-Nūn ever came in contact with one another. However, it is damaging because these two characters are so thematically similar that they are essentially literary pairs, each adding depth and nuance to the other in order for the reader to glean the multidimensionality of their message.

There are several problems with the Western academic approach to writing about Sūfī saints, such as Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and Dhū'n-Nūn, who did not leave behind works of their own. In Rābi'a's case, the problem stems from Margaret Smith's book, which was the first text to take a survey of every known work mentioning Rābi'a and use them to make a character mosaic. Every later book⁵ or article⁶ that mentions Rābi'a uses Margaret Smith's research as a major source. Likewise, many works depicting Dhū'n-Nūn⁷ take several prominent primary sources⁸ and piece them together to form a cohesive narrative. This approach leads to several problems in Western scholarship, which can be described in two ways: issues inherent in the primary source material, and issues that stem from recontextualizing these stories.

The first issue that impacts both Rābi'a's and Dhū'n-Nūn's stories is that many of the primary sources have not always been available to scholars or are untrustworthy. One difficulty,

⁴ Interestingly, Margaret Smith is one of the only scholars to pair these two characters. She mentions that there are episodes that connect the two figures, though she does not provide any examples or citations for this claim, and she points out that they are of doubtful authenticity. She also notes that they both espouse the theme of love. Margaret Smith, *Rābi'a: The Life and Work of Rābi'a and Other Women Mystics in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1994), 35.

⁵ This includes Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* and Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism* (Boston: Brill, 2000).

⁶ See Annemarie Schimmel, "Women in Mystical Islam" in *Women's Studies International Forum* (1982): 145-151; Heidi A. Ford "Hierarchical Inversions, Divine Subversions: The Miracles of Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya" in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (1999): 5-25.

⁷ See footnote 3.

⁸ Such as Qushayrī's *Risāla* and 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat*.

perhaps the easiest to remedy, is the fact that ‘Abū Abd ar-Rahmān Sulamī’s *Dhikr al-niswa’ al-muta’abbidāt aṣ-ṣūfiyyāt* had not been recovered during Margaret Smith’s time. This may not have been a significant loss, as Rābi‘a’s entry in this work was copied word-for-word in Ibn al-Jawzī’s (d. 1201) *Ṣifāt aṣ-ṣafwa*. Ibn al-Jawzī’s entry on Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya was included in Ibn Khallikān’s (1282) *Wafayāt al-a’yān wa-anbā’ abnā az-zamān*, which is one of the most prominent biographical dictionaries to this day. Because Margaret Smith used this work, the entirety of Sulamī’s entry on Rābi‘a was available to her, though she was unaware of its connection to Sulamī.

The more pressing difficulty existent in the source material regarding both figures is that it is impossible to distinguish between fact and fiction in their stories. Neither Rābi‘a nor Dhū’n-Nūn left behind works, and there are no sources on them from their own time. The earliest sources⁹ concerning Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya were written almost two centuries after she would have died, and both figures’ stories were expanded upon centuries after their deaths.¹⁰ Over the course of about 200 years, both figures were portrayed in different ways by various compilers, and many stories appeared that had not appeared previously. While the general belief is that these stories were transmitted orally, it is impossible to know whether this transmission was accurate and without invention.

⁹ These include al-Makkī’s (d. 996) *Qūt al-qulūb*, in which Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s name is mentioned once in passing and al-Kallabadhi’s (d. 990) *Kitāb at-Ta’arruf*, in which Rābi‘a receives one sentence of mention. However, Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s inclusion in al-Makkī’s *Qūt al-Qulūb* is a mistake, as the story he attributes to Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya is actually a story about Rābi‘a al-Azdiyya, who was also from Baṣra. This story is corrected in Abū ‘Abd ar-Rahman as-Sulamī, *Dhikr al-niswa’ al-muta’abbidāt aṣ-ṣūfiyyāt*, trans. Rkia Cornell (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999), 128-129.

¹⁰ Farīd ad-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (d 1220) devotes an entire chapter to both Dhū’n-Nūn and Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya, and he features stories that are not included in other collections which we have today.

This issue is exacerbated given that there are already problems with source material from the early Islamic period, which is wrought with contradictions and chronological discrepancies, particularly with respect to the meaning of events. These sources have been contaminated with anachronism and embellishment, calling into question their usefulness as historical sources.¹¹ These issues also pertain to the biographies of Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya, which have been confused with those of Rābi‘a bint Ismā‘īl of Damascus¹² (d. 830) and Rābi‘a al-Azdiyya.¹³ Rābi‘a of Damascus was considered to be so similar to Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya in terms of spirituality that the one was often mistaken for the other by later sources. As a result, we cannot be sure that some of the stories which are attributed to Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya were not actually about Rābi‘a bint Ismā‘īl of Damascus, and vice versa.¹⁴ These problems also pertain to Dhū’n-Nūn, whose stories in Qushayrī’s *Risāla* are literary in nature and written at such a high level that it is unlikely that Dhū’n-Nūn actually said it himself as written.¹⁵ The stories and sayings ascribed to Rābi‘a and Dhū’n-Nūn may have been attributed to these figures due to their popularity and fame, but they are relevant today because, regardless of their historical accuracy, they have been absorbed into these characters’ narratives, and are accepted as part of their lives.

The second problem in Western scholarship is the approach which recontextualizes these stories while simultaneously treating the source material uncritically. By blending together all of

¹¹ Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc, 1998), 5.

¹² For more information about the life of Rābi‘a bint Ismā‘īl of Damascus, see Sulamī, *Dhikr al-niswā’*, 138-139; Camille Adams Helminski, *Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure* (Boston: Shambhala, 2003), 35.

¹³ For more information about the life of Rābi‘a al-Azdiyya, see Sulamī, *Dhikr al-niswā’*, 128-129.

¹⁴ Additionally, Ahmet T. Karamustafa points out that it has been proven that some verses about love which had previously been attributed to Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya actually stem from a secular love poem. Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 4.

¹⁵ For example, Sulamī writes that Dhū’n-Nūn said, “Fear is the watchman of deeds and hope is the intercessor of adversities.” Abū ‘Abd ar-Rahman as-Sulamī, *Kitāb ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīyya* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), 30.

the later sources on these figures, Western scholars necessarily strip the stories of their original context and forces them to fit Western literary forms. In so doing, this results in the loss of the historical clues which provide insight into the authors' intent. Prioritizing historical and biographical elements without first examining if such an approach is appropriate for the source material results in obfuscating or ignoring information that reveals the intent of the text.

An additional reason this issue is problematic is the way that Western scholars handle the primary source material when writing about Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and Dhū'n-Nūn. These writers, including Margaret Smith, Annemarie Schimmel, and Alexander Knysh, treat their sources uncritically, as if they are equal and written with the same purpose in mind.¹⁶ The work which discusses Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya most extensively and is also a major source for Dhū'n-Nūn's stories is Farīd ad-Dīn Muḥammad b 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-awliyā'*,¹⁷ which was never intended to be a historical work, but was instead written as a work of literature.¹⁸ 'Aṭṭār did not prioritize historical accuracy when he wrote the *Tadhkirat*, but instead used Ṣūfī saints as characters whose messages could prepare the reader for a relationship with God.¹⁹ In so doing, 'Aṭṭār adds to the legend of his subjects, calling into question the reliability of his stories and making it inappropriate to combine them with other Ṣūfī works. This issue is compounded by

¹⁶ Annemarie Schimmel is so uncritical of her source material that she even attributes the literary stylistics of Dhū'n-Nūn's sayings to Dhū'n-Nūn himself, rather than the compilers of his stories. In *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, she praises his poetic talent and skill with the Arabic language, which likely was the work of the compiler rather than Dhū'n-Nūn himself. For this discussion, see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 45.

¹⁷ Margaret Smith herself acknowledges the problems inherent in relying on 'Attar as a historical source, as she says about his work, "legends had grown up around the memory of the saints he portrayed and he has not hesitated to insert them, and probably to add considerably to them." That said, after this note, she uses 'Attar's work indiscriminately. Smith, *Rābi'a*, 6.

¹⁸ Paul Losensky, introduction to *Farīd ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's Memorial of God's Friends: Lives and Sayings of Ṣūfīs* by Farīd ad-Dīn 'Aṭṭār, trans. Paul Losensky. (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2009), 2.

¹⁹ Losensky, introduction, 2-3.

the fact that Western scholars rely on ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat* as heavily as, if not more than, any other work for Rābi‘a and Dhū’n-Nūn.²⁰ ‘Aṭṭār’s work has further obfuscated any historical observations available on these figures, and the problems present in earlier Western sources have infiltrated the later source material. As such, Western scholarship is in need of a new approach.

Such a new approach, and the one taken in this thesis, comes in the form of studying each text individually to get a greater understanding of the ideas that both characters espouse in relation to the overarching text, and to examine the differences between these individuals’ narratives, despite their thematic similarities. Because Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya and Dhū’n-Nūn have an intensely intimate relationship with God while being in different minority groups, examining the texts in this way will enable scholars to see how the authors handle these two elements in their texts, while simultaneously seeing how these characters have evolved in relation to history. Instead of assuming the historical accuracy of these stories, this approach places Rābi‘a and Dhū’n-Nūn in the context of the works in which they are recorded, enabling the reader to consider the historical events which informed the texts themselves. In other words, this approach aims to take a broader view of the evolution of Rābi‘a and Dhū’n-Nūn and look beyond their immediate stories.

To begin this process, this thesis will examine three key works that transmit stories concerning both Rābi‘a and Dhū’n-Nūn: *Dhikr al-niswa’ al-muta‘abbidāt aṣ-ṣūfiyyāt* by Abū ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Al-Risāla al-Qushayrīya fī ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf* by Abū ‘l-Qāsim al-

²⁰ In fact, Margaret Smith relies on the *Tadhkirat* more heavily than any other source in her work.

Qushayrī, and *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*’ by Farīd ad-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Aṭṭār (commonly known as ‘Aṭṭār). These works have been selected for several reasons: first, they made enormous contributions to the furtherance of Sufism. Second, they are the earliest known sources to contain collections of both Rābi‘a’s and Dhū’n-Nūn’s stories, making them the best sources to establish the beginnings of each character’s evolution. Third, the works of Sulamī and Qushayrī are the earliest sources for Ibn Khallikān’s *Wafayāt al-a‘yān wa-anbā’ abnā az-zamān*.²¹ Likewise, ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat* is among the most distinguished Persian-language sources on Ṣūfī biographies. As such, these works are all among the most important contributions to the narratives of Rābi‘a al-‘Adawīyya and Dhū’n-Nūn.

These works are appropriate to consider together due to the fact that they are from a similar time and geographic region. First, they were all written within approximately two hundred years of each other. Second, they were all written in the same city, Nishapur. This city was a major trading spot located between the Arabian Peninsula and China. As a result, it was a cultural and intellectual hub, in which numerous intellectual debates and works matriculated.

Finally, these works are also tied together by two shared themes. Each author is concerned with a key debate that broke out and crystalized during their time: that of the correct way to practice Sufism. Additionally, each author problematizes the issue of gender while ignoring the issue of race, though each of them notes that Dhū’n-Nūn is Nubian. This

²¹ This book is greatly respected and widely cited because of the great pains that Ibn Khallikān went to in writing it, as he spent around eight years compiling and revising it. It contains depictions of many of his contemporaries and includes sources that are unavailable, either because they have been lost to us, or because they have not yet been published. For more information, see J.W. Fück, “Ibn Kḥallikān.” In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al., (Brill Online, 2012), accessed April 7, 2015 .http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ibn-khallikan-SIM_3248.

comparison will address the question of the extent to which gender in particular has impacted Rābi‘a stories.

This thesis is comprised of four sections. It begins with a brief discussion of the tension regarding how to practice Sufism. Because of the prevalence of abstract, mystical practices, there was considerable space for people to participate in heretical practices, or practices for which they were spiritually unprepared, and claim that they were following the Path. This problem led to division over the extent to which these practices were allowed. Many scholars argued that these practices separated the follower from God, which is reflected in Šūfī writings.

The second section examines Sulamī’s discussion of Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya in *Dhikr al-niswā’ al-muta‘abbidāt aṣ-ṣūfiyyāt* and Dhū’n-Nūn in the *Ṭabaqāt*. It will approach these works by examining Rābi‘a’s stories in order to see the themes which are espoused within the text, and then comparing Sulamī’s depiction of Rābi‘a against his depiction of Dhū’n-Nūn in his *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* to see the difference in these characters’ portrayals. It will show that, in each instance, these characters maintain a special level of intimacy with God. However, Sulamī emphasizes Rābi‘a’s outsider status over Dhū’n-Nūn’s as part of his argument that women had access to the Šūfī Path that was generally not available to men. Sulamī takes a different approach to Dhū’n-Nūn, implying that the character’s minority status does not represent the same types of problems and advantages that Rābi‘a’s does, implying that it bears no significance for the practice of Sufism in Sulamī’s view.

The third section examines Qushayrī’s depiction of both characters in the *Risāla*. Qushayrī’s depiction of these characters differs from Sulamī’s for three reasons: first, Qushayrī bases the structure of his *ṭabaqāt* section on Sulamī’s *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, which does not include

Rābi‘a.²² Second, Qushayrī writes an apologetic work attempting to argue against extreme mystical traditions. Third, Qushayrī openly mistrusts women throughout his work.²³ Each point helps determine the way that both characters, particularly Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya, are depicted in Qushayrī’s work.

The fourth and final section of this work will examine the depiction of Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya and Dhū’n-Nūn in Farīd ad-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*. It will show that both of these characters essentially complete one another, as they root their connection to God in their marginalization. However, the importance of this marginalization is much clearer in Rābi‘a’s stories, as ‘Aṭṭār makes a point to problematize her gender and uses it to demonstrate that women have access to a unique spiritual realm in the *Tadhkirat*.

Examining each of these texts will not only address the issues present in these characters’ narratives, but also to show how both Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya and Dhū’n-Nūn have been used in numerous authors’ works to further their arguments. These arguments helped form the evolution of these depictions as much as the stories themselves, and so need to be considered if we are to understand what ideas they represent in their respective texts. As a representative of interests in the text, the standard narrative of Rābi‘a and Dhū’n-Nūn is opened up for questioning and expansion. This will benefit future scholarship, as it will force it to approach the primary source material with more nuance and care.

²² The differences between these two works are discussed later in this paper. See page 44.

²³ Abū ‘l-Qasim al-Qushayrī al-Qushayrī, *Al-Qushayrī’s Epistle on Sufism: Al-Risāla al-Qushayrīya fī ‘ilm al-tasawwuf*, trans. Alexander D. Knysh (South Street: Garnet Publishing Limited 2007), 3.

Historical Background

Before focusing on the construction of the Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya and Dhū’n-Nūn in the works of Sulamī, Qushayrī, and ‘Aṭṭār, we must have an understanding of the debate surrounding advanced stages along the Ṣūfī Path, particularly the state of intimacy. Intimacy, which is a major element in each figure’s stories, is a rarely discussed state along the Ṣūfī path, and its obfuscation particularly stems from the considerable ideological tension present during the early centuries of Sufism. In the initial centuries after Muhammad’s death, there was considerable concern over the development of Islam in general, and this was especially the case within the Ṣūfī community.

One of the greatest ideological issues facing Sufism was its relationship to the Sharī‘a, despite the fact that almost all Ṣūfis emphasized the Sharī‘a as a foundation for the Ṣūfī path. Al-Ḥallāj is infamous for breaking with many Ṣūfī traditions, most notably sharing mystical secrets and experiences with the public, which caused him to be disavowed by many of his teachers. As he gained more followers and participated in increasingly heretical practices,²⁴ al-Ḥallāj earned the ire of scholars across numerous theological and legal schools, including the Mu’tazilis, the Shī‘a, the Zāhirīs, and the Shāfi’īs. This ultimately resulted in his execution²⁵ and led many to view Sufism as heretical or unworthy of being taken seriously. To this day there are three viewpoints regarding al-Ḥallāj’s status with respect to the Sharī‘a: some people condemn him by rejecting his beliefs or labeling him as an unbeliever, some acknowledge his sainthood by

²⁴ Such as declaring himself to be God and, worst of all, building a model of the Ka’aba in his household and circumambulating it during the pilgrimage season.

²⁵ Though there is much evidence that suggests that al-Ḥallāj was executed for political reasons, rather than for his religious beliefs. For more information on the life and teachings of al-Ḥallāj, see Louis Massignon, *La Passion d’Al-Hosayn ibn Mansour al-Hallj, martyr mystique de l’Islam execute a Baghdad le 26 Mars 922*, (Paris, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1922).

vindicating his behavior or adopting it unconditionally, and finally some maintain a pious suspicion of his beliefs.²⁶

After al-Ḥallāj, Sufism was left in an awkward position. Many outsiders viewed Sufism unworthy of being taken seriously. Even more problematic, Sufism was confronted with the fact that it could actually lead people away from God because al-Ḥallāj shared mystical secrets with novices on the path. Many of its practices are esoteric and require spiritual maturity for one to participate in them correctly. Since they were revealed early to the public, some people tried to participate in them before accumulating the spiritual maturity necessary to handle them. As a result, beginners took part in practices incorrectly or prematurely, further separating them from God.

This issue led to a heavy emphasis on a group who were considered the ‘religious elect’-- God’s chosen people who had gained such a close relationship with Him and progressed so far along the path toward Him that they were privy to information that others were not. This mindset resulted in the Ṣūfī masters of intentionally obfuscating information, particularly by using abstract language and context-driven messages. For instance, al-Junayd is infamous for using “profoundly subtle, meditated language” which “formed the nucleus of all subsequent elaboration.”²⁷ This was intentional, as this language would have been strategically selected in order to ensure that only the religious elect could understand his message.

Likewise, Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī’s (d. 996) approach in his work differs depending on his intended audience. His most famous work, *Qūt al-qulūb* (“The Nourishment of the Hearts”), which was written for beginners on the Ṣūfī path, is an apologetic text that “simply brims with

²⁶ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 73-82.

²⁷ A. J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 56-57.

long-winded quotations from the Qur’ān, the *ḥadīth* and the respectable mainstream Sunni opinions which are meant to underscore the perfectly orthodox nature of Ṣūfī piety and customs.”²⁸ Throughout his work, al-Makkī attempts to heal some of the damage done by al-Ḥallāj and his followers by underscoring that Sufism begins with the Sharī‘a, meaning that a rejection of the Sharī‘a is a rejection of Sufism. In contrast, al-Makkī’s other Ṣūfī treatise, *‘Ilm al-qulūb* (“Knowledge of the Hearts”)²⁹ is intended solely for the Ṣūfī elite, as it tackles subjects absent from *Qūt al-qulūb*, including *‘arif*, *tawḥīd* and “its implications for the life of an individual mystic, the events of the primordial covenant between God and men, the light of Muḥammad, and so on.”³⁰ Al-Makkī is clearly trying to emphasize that beginner Ṣūfīs need a solid foundation before they can even attempt to approach these more mystical topics, which should be reserved for the elite, nuanced Ṣūfī masters.

Another author who reserves secrets for the elect is al-Kalābādhī (d. 990 or 995), who is especially known for his work *Kitāb at-ta‘arruf li-mahdhab ahl at-taṣawwuf* (Introduction to the Doctrine of the Ṣūfīs). This work is apologetic, aiming to ground Sufism in the realm of Sunni Islam, and he acknowledges the disagreements among the Ṣūfī masters. More importantly, he “recognizes that certain advanced mystical truths might confuse the public and therefore should not be divulged to outsiders.”³¹ This further demonstrates that there are certain ideas and practices beyond the understanding of the public and the novice, which should be reserved for

²⁸ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 121.

²⁹ The attribution of this book to al-Makkī’s is open to some debate. For a discussion on this debate, see Saeko Yazaki, “A Pseudo-Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī: The Authenticity of *‘Ilm al-qulūb*,” *Arabica* 59, no. 6 (October 2012): 650-684.

³⁰ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 122.

³¹ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 124.

the elite. Their solution to this issue is to ground practitioners in the Sunna by making them follow the Shāri‘a.

On Intimacy:

Rābi‘a’s and Dhū’n-Nūn’s similarities are grounded in their shared minority status and their intimate relationship with God. This intimacy is often alluded to in Western scholarship on Sufism, but it has not been carefully explored. This lack of exploration stems from the many problems with the source material, which make Sufism notoriously difficult to discuss. Additionally, many Ṣūfī states are so abstract that they are difficult to describe accurately, particularly due to the considerable overlap among them. Ṣūfī writers very carefully and intentionally structured their works in such a way that there are no single, stand-alone definitions. Instead, each state is defined using short sayings or stories from various Ṣūfī masters, which altogether grant the reader a rough outline of the nature of the state, making the descriptions more accurate, but more difficult for the reader to understand. The definition of each state is also illuminated by the discourse on other states, adding extra dimensions to the readers’ understanding of states with which they are already familiar. For instance, one might start with the state of annihilation (*fanā’*) and subsistence (*baqā’*) and move into absence (*ghayba*) and presence (*ḥuḍūr*), all of which are interconnected and provide nuance to one another.³²

³² One person who is especially well known for this is al-Qushayrī. For more information see Michael Sells, introduction to “Qushayrī: Interpreting Mystical Expressions from the *Treatise*” by Abū ‘l-Qasim al-Qushayrī in *Early Islamic Mysticism: Ṣūfī, Qur’ān, Mi‘rāj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 97-98.

One particularly contentious element from the days of early Sufism is the question of who should access more advanced practices and stages along the Ṣūfī path. One of the most complicated and abstracted stages is intimacy (*uns*) with God. During the formative period of Sufism, there emerged a twofold approach to God focusing on both intimacy, which includes direct understanding, and awe (*hayba*).³³ These approaches to God temper one another, as the practitioner is simultaneously overcome with amazement for God and given direct understanding of God through this experience. Many Western authors³⁴ describe the relationship between intimacy and awe in terms of German Lutheran theologian Rudolf Otto's idea of the numinous (meaning that which is holy), which is characterized as both *mysterium tremendum* and *mysterium fascinans* at the same time. This is an experience that is outside of the self in which one is simultaneously terrified and fascinated by the numinous.³⁵

The Ṣūfī understanding of intimacy is that it is among the deepest forms of love, and is attained by a servant who has advanced beyond the stages of hope and expansion.³⁶ It follows that the person who has achieved the state of intimacy is an extremely advanced follower of God. Qushayrī describes intimacy by saying that “The minimal requirement for intimacy is when you throw someone into a blazing fire and this does not perturb his intimacy.”³⁷ Intimacy is a form of focus on God that is so perfect and complete that nothing can distract the follower from his

³³ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 6.

Schimmel refers to this distinction as being between “intimacy” and “respect.” *Uns* is typically contrasted by *hayba*, and I believe that “awe” is a more accurate translation of “*hayba*” given the way it is typically discussed.

³⁴ For example, see Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Ṣūfī Qur'ān, Mi'raj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 108-110. and Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 44.

³⁵ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 6.

³⁶ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 81.

³⁷ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 82.

relationship with Him. Qushayrī adds another dimension to his description of intimacy and awe, saying:

When the states of awe and intimacy appear, the people of the Truth consider it to be a deficiency, because they entail a change in the servant of God. The spiritual states of the people of constancy are above such change. These are completely effaced by their encounter with the [Divine] Essence. Therefore they can experience neither awe nor intimacy and have neither knowledge nor sense.³⁸

The servants of God achieve consistency through the process of erasing their selves in God. This goes beyond even accomplished Ṣūfī masters, who are unable to see where they are along the path. Intimacy is a state that lies so far beyond the layman's comprehension that it is difficult for Ṣūfī masters to understand, much less the general public. As such, intimacy is not discussed explicitly by the Ṣūfī masters, but is instead left for the elite to come to on their own. Jami adds to the description of the distinction between intimacy and awe, saying,

to whom the Primordial Grace and Lovingkindness has granted salvation after their being submerged in complete union and in the wave of unification,³⁹ out of the belly of the fish 'Annihilation' on the shore of separation and in the arena of permanent subsistence, so that they might lead the people towards salvation. The others are those who are completely submerged in the ocean of Unity and have been so completely naughted in the belly of the fish 'Annihilation' that never a news or trace comes to the shore of separation and the direction of subsistence...and the sanctity of perfecting others is not entrusted to them.⁴⁰

Jāmī explains that once the self has been annihilated (*fānā* ') in God, there are two ways for people to continue along their path. The first of these is remaining (*baqā* ') after annihilation in which one returns from union with God and comes back to lead novices to God. In the second

³⁸ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 82.

³⁹ *Tawhid*

⁴⁰ Jāmī' as quoted in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 6.

way, focusing around intimacy, the self has been annihilated to such an extent that there is no returning to the state of being separated from God. Intimacy with God goes beyond the general understanding of *fanā'*, as traditionally *fanā'* is always connected to *baqā'*. More importantly, when people reach the state of intimacy, they move beyond the realm of communicable knowledge, and are no longer in a place where they can help the novice along the path. Their self has been obliterated so completely that they no longer interact with the world in the way that can be understood by anyone other than God's elect.

This understanding of intimacy is particularly important in the examination of Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and Dhū'n-Nūn. For the most part, Rābi'a's stories are largely connected to love for God; however, Ahmet T. Karamustafa makes a brief reference to the fact that Rābi'a's relationship with God goes much deeper, as "[Rābi'a's] relentless focus on God reportedly took the form of love (*maḥab-ba*) and intimacy (*uns*)."⁴¹ This becomes clearer as Rābi'a's stories are examined: she is described as having removed herself from society, refuses to participate in cultural practices, and is only visited by accomplished Ṣūfī masters. Additionally, she often notes that she is so enraptured by God that she is unable to love or even contemplate anything else.

Likewise, Dhū'n-Nūn is not particularly known in the West for his intimate relationship with God, as scholars focus on his relationship to *ma'rifa* while mostly excluding comments regarding his work on intimacy. There are some exceptions to this, as Annemarie Schimmel mentions that Dhū'n-Nūn has many passages about both 'love' and 'intimacy' attributed to him, and so these two themes are still important in the development of his character.⁴² Dhū'n-Nūn

⁴¹ Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 4.

⁴² Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 43.

also notes how true love for God requires that one be utterly unconcerned with anything other than Him, which follows the theoretical paradigm outlined by Qushayrī, Hujwīrī, and Jāmī in their descriptions of intimacy. As intimacy is a major part of these two characters' development, it will be explored with this work.

Sulamī's Dhikr: Femininity Through Servitude

With this background in mind, we turn to the discussion of Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and Dhū'n-Nūn in Sulamī's hagiographical works. Sulamī was very aware of the tendency of many novice Ṣūfīs to move away from following the Sunna, and so he created what is widely viewed as a "uṣūlization" process, meaning that Sulamī attempted to make Sufism work in tandem with the Sunna. This process is reflected in his hagiographical works; however, in his portrayal of Rābi'a, Sulamī prioritizes the theme that women, who were traditionally placed below men, have access to a unique relationship with God through servitude. Interestingly, Sulamī's interest in marginalized groups only extends to women; Dhū'n-Nūn's race is glossed over and never problematized in Sulamī's work. As such, this section will examine the how Sulamī uses Rābi'a's stories to explore the relationship between women and God, while Dhū'n-Nūn's stories concentrate more on the theme of intimacy with God.

Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Sulamī⁴³ (d. 1021) was an extremely prolific Ṣūfī scholar who wrote approximately 100 works, most of which are lost today. He was born in Nishapur, and was connected to the Baghdad school of Sufism. This connection stemmed from his maternal grandfather, Abū 'Amr Ismā'īl b. Nujayd (d.976-7), who was entrusted with Sulamī's religious education and as a young child he met the great Ṣūfī shaykh Abū'l-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 910) in Baghdad. This connection was deepened by his relationship with Ibn Nujayd's associate, Abū

⁴³ Sulamī's works include: Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. Al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Mūsā as-Sulamī, *Kitāb ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīyya* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960); however, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān as-Sulamī, *Kitāb ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīyya* ed. Johannes Pedersen (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960) includes a more extensive introduction.; Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān as-Sulamī, *al-Muqaddimah fī al-tasawwuf li-'Abi 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1999). For biographical information and analysis of Sulamī's work, see G. Böwering, "al-Sulamī." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al., (Brill Online, 2012), accessed April 7, 2015. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-Sulamī-SIM_7147; G. Böwering, "The Qur'ān commentary of Al-Sulamī," in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams*, ed. W.B. Hallaq and D.P. Little (Leiden: 1991), 41-56.

Sahl as-Šu‘lūkī (d. 980), who formally initiated Sulamī into Sufism by approving him to teach his own pupils. Finally, upon becoming a Šūfī master, Sulamī received his Šūfī cloak from Abū ‘l-Qāsim al-Našrābādhī (d. 977-8).⁴⁴ He studied *ḥadīth* avidly, and, after becoming a Šūfī master he travelled throughout Khurasan and Iraq, particularly Merv and Baghdad. Sulamī returned to Nishapur shortly after Ibn Nujayd died, leaving him a small fortune, including a house and a library. He remained there for the rest of his life, though he did travel to Baghdad several times.

During Sulamī’s lifetime Nishapur was an important trade city, resting at the crossroads of multiple highways between Khurasan and the far east, including China and India. It consisted of hundreds of smaller farming villages, which were all regulated by Nishapur’s centralized bureaucracy.⁴⁵ Nishapur was a cultural hub in which three ethnic major groups melded together: Arabs, Persians, and Turks. While the region of Nishapur was originally Persian, due to the Arab conquests of the eighth century, a significant Arab population developed. These ethnic shifts led to the infusion of Islam in the city, and made Arabic the language of religion, while Persian remained the language of the populace.

During Sulamī’s time, Nishapur was ruled by the Sāmānids, who were a Sunni family descended from Persian nobles. They were known for being peaceful, as they sustained a good relationship with their neighbors, and primarily kept abreast of religious disputes. Their religious tolerance enabled intellectual arts to flourish in Nishapur, particularly Sufism and philosophy.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Knysh. *Islamic Mysticism*, 125.

⁴⁵ For a more detailed description of Nishapur, see Richard Bulliet, *Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

⁴⁶ Rkia Cornell, introduction to *Early Šūfī Women: Dhikr al-niswa’ al-muta‘abbidāt aš-šūfiyyāt*, by Abū ‘Abd ar-Raḥman as-Sulamī (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999) 25.

While the Sāmānids were relatively peaceful, they could not overcome the problems raised by the Turkish Qarākhānids and the Ghaznavids at the end of the tenth century. There was a wide gap between the Sāmānids and their rulership, which resulted in the Sāmānids receiving very little assistance from the populace throughout their conflict with the Turks.⁴⁷

As mentioned previously, Sulamī was a prolific writer who wrote numerous texts on Islam, and was particularly concerned with Sufism. He is known for being one of the earliest Ṣūfīs to approach hagiography in a way comparable to the approach of historians,⁴⁸ who separate their subjects into generations which are placed in chronological periods.⁴⁹ The most prominent of Sulamī's works was the *Ṭabaqāt aṣ-ṣūfiyya* (Generations of the Ṣūfīs), a compendium of Ṣūfī hagiography. This text is believed to be an abridgment of a much larger work called *Ta'rīkh aṣ-ṣūfiyya* (History of the Ṣūfīs), and is said to have consisted of one thousand biographies.

Sulamī's work was primarily a 'uṣūlization' project, meaning that Sulamī attempted to make Sufism work in tandem with the Sunna.⁵⁰ Al Iṣbahānī discusses Sulamī's concern for 'uṣūlization' in *Hilyat al-awliyā' wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā*, noting that Al Iṣbahānī discusses Sulamī's concern for 'uṣūlization' in *Hilyat al-awliyā' wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā*, noting that Sulamī valued emulating the Prophet above all else, which made him superior to many of his peers.⁵¹ Sulamī also wrote the *Dhikr al-niswā' al-muta'abbidāt aṣ-ṣūfiyyāt*, which was meant to be a supplement to his *Ṭabaqāt*, and is a hagiographical work on female Ṣūfī saints.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴⁸ The other early writer to do this was Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 1037) with his work, *Hilyat al-awliyā'*.

⁴⁹ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. 85.

⁵⁰ Cornell, introduction, 38.

⁵¹ Abū Nu'aym Ahmad ibn 'Abdallāh al-Iṣbahānī, *Hilyat al-awliyā' wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā*, trans. Rkia Cornell, ed. Abū Hajir Sa'id ibn Basyuni Zaghlul, 2 (1932-38; repr., Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-Arabi, 1967-68), 25.

Although Sulamī wrote several biographical works, his interest in Islam extended far beyond simply recording Ṣūfī history. Instead, he sought to help people navigate the nebulous nature of Sufism by creating boundaries along the path for them. Sulamī’s approach to creating this structure was two-fold: first, he aimed to remove deviant practices from Ṣūfī practice and differentiate Sufism from other forms of Islamic asceticism and devotion, and second, he created “normative paradigms for new approaches to Sufism, such as *futuwwa*, the popular institution of Ṣūfī chivalry.”⁵² Sulamī wrote numerous works to this effect, including *Kitāb al-malāmatiyya wa ghalaṭāt as-ṣūfiyya* (The Path of Blame and the Errors of the Ṣūfīs) and *‘Uyūb an-naḥs wa mudāwātuhā* (The Faults of the Soul and Their Cures).

Additionally, Sulamī wrote a work of Qur’ānic exegesis entitled *Ḥaqā’iq at-tafsīr* (Realities of Exegesis). It was an extremely popular work during Sulamī’s time; however, it was not without its critics. Several members of the Ḥanbalī school, among them Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), criticized Sulamī’s inclusion of Ja‘far as-Ṣādiq (d. 765), the sixth Shī‘ī Imām who is particularly revered by the Twelvers and Ismā‘īlīs, as a source. While Sulamī’s work connects Sufism to Sunni Islam, this inclusion indicates that he was not opposed to all aspects of Shi‘ism.⁵³

Sulamī wrote his *Dhikr* after the *Ṭabaqāt*, and it is likely meant as an extension of the *Ṭabaqāt*. Women are mostly unmentioned in the *Ṭabaqāt*, which is unsurprising as that was the norm during Sulamī’s time. However, the *Dhikr* focuses entirely on Ṣūfī women, being comprised of stories of eighty-two women, each entry consisting of a few short vignettes about each woman’s life. These are not biographies in the traditional sense, as Sulamī does not

⁵² Cornell, introduction to *Early Ṣūfī Women*, 40.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 42.

construct a narrative of the subjects' lives, but instead gives the reader a few short passages which indicate the nature of the relationship between the saints and God. The reader is often left without many details concerning these women's lives, such as the circumstances of their births and deaths, as well as the major events which occurred during their lives. However, this is the earliest known collection of biographies of Ṣūfī women, making this work a very rare type of source. Additionally, the stories from the *Dhikr* are later recorded in many important Ṣūfī works, particularly Ibn Jawzī's *Ṣifat al-ṣafwah* and Ibn Khallikān's biographical dictionary, and so, while their stories were only recently attributed to Sulamī recently by at-Tanahi in 1993, it has had wide-reaching impact on the discussion of Rābi'a's stories in later Muslim scholarship.

In fact, leading up to Sulamī, not only were women not given this amount of space in scholarship, they were left anonymous when they did appear in the biographies of men. This practice left women unnamed and utterly unidentified, thereby veiling their identities. In this way, women were kept at a lower position than their male counterparts, as they were given no space in the scholastic tradition except as a plot device or a trope.

The *Dhikr* represents a clear break with this tradition, as women are not only identified, but also made the subjects of their own narratives. The work is arranged by region⁵⁴ rather than chronologically, and its stories mimic the structure of a *ḥadīth* in that it includes the chain of transmitters, or *isnād*, and then the contents of the story. These stories differ from *ḥadīths* in their intent, rather than conveying historical truths, their purpose is to be pieced together to form a cohesive image depicting the place Sufism allows for women. The *Dhikr* depicts multiple dimensions of the space allotted for women in Sufism, ranging from the nature of the ideal

⁵⁴ This lends itself to corresponding to the locations of the Ṣūfī schools, suggested in Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1922) 94-214.

relationship between the female Ṣūfī and God to the types of practices that women should partake of in order to develop such a relationship. As such, Sulamī's *Dhikr* is not merely a biography, but a rough sketch of the archetypal Ṣūfī woman.

In Sulamī's work, Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya becomes both the quintessential Baṣran Ṣūfī woman,⁵⁵ and also the archetypal Ṣūfī woman. She is so important in the *Dhikr* that she is the first entry in the book and has the largest section dedicated to her. Sulamī's interest in her is primarily as a religious symbol, as there is no mention of any of her biographical details other than that she is from Baṣra and was a client of the al-'Atīk clan.⁵⁶ There is no mention of her birth, her death, or any of the key events of her life, implying that the purpose of the text is not to remember Rābi'a as a person, but to illuminate her as a representative of the themes and ideals which are essential to the Ṣūfī tradition.

Rābi'a in Sulamī's Dhikr:

The most prominent argument in Sulamī's *Dhikr al-niswā' al-muta'abbidāt aṣ-ṣūfīyyāt* is that female saints have special access God, and this theme is embodied by the Ṣūfī saint Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya. In order to forward this argument, Sulamī includes stories which pit Rābi'a against male Ṣūfīs who value their egos, thereby undermining their ability to be servants of God.

With this juxtaposition, Sulamī begins to challenge men's supremacy on the path to God. His view on women is hinted by his introduction to the *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīyya*, in which he uses the

⁵⁵ Rkia Cornell maintains that there were probably many women in the area of Baṣra with similar ideological beliefs, and she refers to them as participating in the same school. However, this is likely a bit of a misnomer, as there would not have been a formal institution in which these women participated. As such, while there may be evidence that Baṣran women helped one another move along the Ṣūfī Path, it would have been done in an extremely informal way.
Cornell, introduction, 60.

⁵⁶ Cornell, introduction, 74.

Qur'ānic verse: “And what if not for the believing men and believing women whom you did not know, that you might have fallen upon [them in enmity], and upon whose account a crime would have accrued to you without your knowledge? [God caused them to exist] so that He might admit to His mercy whom He will.”⁵⁷ This verse subtly makes women more visible next to men because it explicitly places them next to men in front of God. Women’s prominence and place in comparison to their male counterparts is then expanded in the *Dhikr*, as in it Sulamī “portrays Ṣūfī women as full equals of their male counterparts in religion and intellect, as well as in their knowledge of Ṣūfī doctrines and practices.”⁵⁸ Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya embodies this idea in the *Dhikr* in two steps: first, by emphasizing her role as a devoted servant of God, and second, by depicting Rābi‘a as being the equal of, and sometimes superior to, her male counterparts.

The *Dhikr* quickly establishes Rābi‘a’s place as a servant, and then uses this servanthood to grant her legitimacy and a place in Sufism. Her chapter begins by explaining that she was from Baṣra and that her stories were transmitted by Sufyān ath-Thawrī, whom she had taught, and Shu‘bah ibn al-Ḥajjāj. Initially, this appears to follow the convention of most biographies, which commonly reference the family and area in which the subject lived and the people who they influenced.⁵⁹

Rābi‘a’s first story sets the tone for the rest of her chapter. In it, Sufyān ath-Thawrī (d. 777-8), who was a well-respected religious scholar, and was particularly known for his

⁵⁷ Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 4.

This verse is Surat al-Faṭḥ, verse 25

⁵⁸ Cornell, introduction, 20.

⁵⁹ Interestingly, Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya is never discussed as a jurist, and there is no reference to her having studied the *ḥadīth*; however, Cornell’s translation of al-Sulamī’s *Dhikr* holds that Sufyān ath-Thawrī went to Rābi‘a for both legal and spiritual advice. Likewise, the fact that these both Sufyān ath-Thawrī and Shu‘ba ibn al-Ḥajjāj are explicitly named is particularly interesting because they were both known for their *ḥadīth* scholarship

knowledge of the *ḥadīth* and his Qur’ānic commentary, says “‘Take me to the mentor [Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya]. For when I am apart from her, I can find no solace.’” He identifies Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya as such an important religious authority that she is at a higher or more advanced state than he—a state that is so high that Sufyān is at a loss when he is not in her presence. This point is developed in the second half of the story, where he meets Rābi‘a and says, “‘Oh God, grant me safety!’ At this Rābi‘a wept. ‘What makes you weep?’ he asked. ‘You have caused me to weep. . . . Have you not learned that true safety from the world is to abandon all that is in it? So how can you ask such a thing while you are still soiled with the world?’”⁶⁰ Rābi‘a not only corrects Sufyān’s practice, but does so in forwarding the idea that his error stems from his preference for this world, rather than developing a relationship with God. As such, this story does two things: first, it solidifies Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya as a central figure and a religious authority, and second, it identifies the source of her authority as being connected to her rejecting the world in favor of turning to God.

The remainder of Rābi‘a’s stories and sayings follow this strategy in that they pit her character against several Ṣūfī men, with her inevitably aiding them along the path. In this way, the stories add to her legitimacy as a Ṣūfī. Interestingly, Sulamī never explicitly discusses her gender, but instead focuses on issues which were debated or discussed in Ṣūfī circles at his time. This deviates greatly from later portrayals of Rābi‘a, which, almost without fail, mention her gender and her ability to avoid the complications of being a woman.

Rābi‘a’s high status in the context of this work stems from her intimate relationship with God; however, because Sulamī’s primary interest is to argue that women have unique access to

⁶⁰ Sulamī, *Dhikr*, 76.

God through servitude, the intimate nature of this relationship goes under-emphasized. Sulamī does include a couple of stories which explain how one can begin to attain intimacy, including one in which Rābi‘a says, “For everything there is a fruit (*thamara*), and the fruit of the knowledge of God (*ma‘rifa*) is in orienting oneself toward God at all times (*iqbāl*).”⁶¹ Rābi‘a explains that knowledge of God enables His followers to properly devote themselves to Him in their entirety. However, Rābi‘a’s use of the term ‘*ma‘rifa*’ to describe knowledge of God, indicates that she is referring to intuitive knowledge of God,⁶² distinguishing it from ‘*ilm*, which is gained through study. As such, this story is one of two hinting at the intimacy between her and God, indicated by al-Ghazzālī’s statement, “Love without gnosis is impossible--one can only love what one knows.”⁶³ Rābi‘a hints that *ma‘rifa* is essential to the relationship between the servants and God, as it leads them to lose awareness of the external world and center themselves in God alone. This is the crux of intimacy, and one of the deeper, more subtle ideas in this story.

The other story which hints at Rābi‘a’s intimate relationship with God is the previously discussed interaction between her and Sufyān ath-Thawrī, wherein she emphasizes the need to disconnect fully from this world in one’s quest for God. In that story, Rābi‘a points out that the only thing worth attention and desire is God, which, when followed by proper practice, is an aspect of intimacy with God. While only a few of Rābi‘a’s stories discuss the intimate nature of Rābi‘a’s relationship with God, it is still an important concept in the greater context of the text.

Dhū’n-Nūn in Sulamī’s Ṭabaqāt

⁶¹ Sulamī, *Dhikr*, 78.

⁶² Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 43.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 130.

In contrast to Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s stories in the *Dhikr*, Sulamī glosses over Dhū’n-Nūn’s minority status. Dhū’n-Nūn is a Nubian and a former slave, and as such he would not have been viewed as the equal of his Arab peers by most in his society. The fact that Sulamī does not problematize Dhū’n-Nūn’s race indicates that he does not view it as a problem in the context of Dhū’n-Nūn’s relationship with God. This also implies a hierarchy among minorities: namely, that gender is an obstacle between women and God whereas race is not. This viewpoint was held by al-Kalābādhī, who, like many early authors, viewed women as being deficient in religion because they cannot pray or fast during their monthly periods. He then made the leap that “the practice of religion is faith itself. The two are the same, even in the view of those who do not see faith as based entirely on works” thereby making the assertion that women are less perfect in their faith than men.⁶⁴ This line of reasoning cannot be applied to racial minorities, whose ability to pray or fast is in no way impacted by their skin color. As such, it makes sense that Sulamī found it necessary to make a place for women in Sufism, but not to search for one for racial minorities, as there was no question about the status of their faith. Instead, Dhū’n-Nūn’s Nubian status is only mentioned as a historical fact, not because it is essential to his development along the path.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī, *The Doctrine of the Sūfīs*, trans. A.J. Arberry (London: Cambridge University Press, 1935) 53. Al-Kalābādhī was not alone in this belief. Another Sūfī author who diminished women’s contributions was the poet Abū al-Majd “Ḥakīm” Ṣanā‘ī (d. 1131) of Ghazna (modern day Afghanistan). All he says on women is, “A pious woman is better than a thousand bad men.” As the same could be said of an ordinary man, this can hardly be said to emphasize the importance of women. See Annemarie Schimmel, appendix to “The Feminine Element in Sufism,” appendix to *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 1975), 426.

⁶⁵ This is not to say that Sulamī never addressed race. In his entry on Malīka the Daughter of Aḥmad ibn Hayyawayh, he notes that, while she and her husband went on the Ḥajj, she gave all their money to some people from Sub-Saharan Africa who were sitting by the Prophet’s tomb. He criticized her, saying, “Only some of that money would have been enough for those blacks, or even less than that!” to which she replied, “How long will you go on with your words, oh Ḥasan? It is as if you see nothing but blacks!” The implication of this is that the race of these people should not be raised as important; it should not be an issue. Sulamī, *Dhikr*, 232-233.

However, Sulamī uses Dhū'n-Nūn to illustrate many of the same themes as those in Rābi'a al-'Adawīyya's stories. He begins his chapter, with Dhū'n-Nūn transmitting a *ḥadīth*, saying, "the temporal world is the prison of the believer and the garden of the unbeliever."⁶⁶ This story is important for two reasons: first, because it echoes all of the themes that are present in Sulamī's story of Rābi'a's confrontation with Sufyān ath-Thawrī, and second, because it ties Dhū'n-Nūn to the Sunna. Like Rābi'a, Dhū'n-Nūn emphasizes the fact that the physical world keeps the Ṣūfī practitioner from God, but he pushes this idea farther, saying that enjoyment in the physical world denotes disbelief, making the physical world a serious obstacle in one's journey toward God because it denigrates peoples' faith. Sulamī begins every entry in the *Ṭabaqāt* with *ḥadīth* transmission, demonstrating that all of the Ṣūfī masters have some background in the Sunna. In Dhū'n-Nūn's case, this is particularly important because his stories address advanced stages and states along the path, many of which could draw criticism were they not grounded in the Sunna. Sulamī implies that even the most advanced Ṣūfī masters must root their practice in the Sunna before they can progress their relationship with God.

The similarities between Rābi'a and Dhū'n-Nūn appear when Dhū'n-Nūn discusses the importance of submission, which is a key element of servitude, in one's movement along the path. On this topic Dhū'n-Nūn says, "every day the knower is more submissive because every hour he is closer [to God]."⁶⁷ Loving God necessitates serving God, which in turn means both annihilating one's ego and also having knowledge of God. It is this knowledge that directs the practitioner in their following God, and it is annihilation of the ego that enables one to submit to God and serve Him adequately.

⁶⁶ Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 24. All translations from Arabic are my own.

⁶⁷ Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 32.

Interestingly, Sulamī also attributes the following saying to Dhū'n-Nūn: "The lowest level of intimacy is that were one cast into fire, his desire would not become absent from the object of his desire [meaning God]."⁶⁸ Intimacy involves consistency and a level of devotion so deep that the practitioner will not become distracted from God by even the most severe external condition. This same quotation is included in Qushayrī's *Risāla*, but is not attributed to any speaker,⁶⁹ while in contrast, Sulamī attributes it to Dhū'n-Nūn. This story demonstrates that there is some confusion as to who actually transmitted this saying, further calling into question the reliability of the source material.

Dhū'n-Nūn continues his discussion of intimacy by saying, "Intimacy with God is bright light, and intimacy with creation [people] is an inescapable grief."⁷⁰ Intimacy is such an overwhelming experience that when it is connected to creation it clouds everything, indicating that the individual cannot move beyond the physical world toward a strong relationship with God. Likewise, the opposite is true of intimacy with God: it clarifies the path practitioners should take in order to deepen their relationship with Him.

Dhū'n-Nūn says about the gnostic, "Truly, the gnostic does not cling to one state, but rather he clings to his Lord in all states."⁷¹ Clinging to a state demonstrates a preference for one's self over a preference for God. The most important thing one can do is to turn to and depend on God. The purpose of the path is to conscientiously strive for closeness to God, and remaining in one state means that the practitioner is no longer moving along the path. Moreover,

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁹ Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 82.

⁷⁰ Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 30.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

states are granted to the follower from God, meaning that they are in no way earned by the practitioner, but a gift from God to His people. These states are not for people to cling to, but for them to experience in order to gain a deeper understanding of and love for God.

Finally, Sulamī includes the following saying about what the follower should desire from God: “While I extend my hand to you invitingly, as long as you suffice to ignore me, I sever my hope for you on account of what my hands do, the sufficient response to my petition is your knowledge of my state.”⁷² This encapsulates a relationship with God in its most basic form: it is the responsibility of all of creation to desire God, but God has no such requirement. The follower should be satisfied by the fact that God knows his place along the path, and God’s followers will be satisfied by God even if He does not answer their petitions. This is the ultimate renunciation of self in the context of one’s relationship with God, as it means that the practitioner’s responsibility is to completely rely on God for all things, but accept God’s decision should He not answer their requests, and be satisfied by the idea that God knows of them. This is the utmost depiction of submission to God, as the follower essentially discards all desires except the desire for God, and allows himself to be left to God’s whims.

Ultimately, Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya and Dhū’n-Nūn are both key figures in Sulamī’s hagiographical works because of their intimate relationship with God. However, Sulamī’s depiction of these two characters is clearly influenced by two separate issues: first is the impact of being a woman in one’s relationship with God, and second is the issue of how to handle the discussion of advanced Ṣūfī states given the necessity of grounding Sufism in the Sunna. These two themes are given different levels of importance in the stories of each character depending on

⁷² *Ibid.*, 28.

its importance in the character's relationship with God. With Dhū'n-Nūn, Sulamī is able to discuss more advanced states along the Ṣūfī path, and focus on how they are accessible once the practitioner has achieved closeness with God. With Rābi'a the discussion is more complicated because Sulamī must contend with her gender and prove that women have a legitimate place in Sufism. This he does by arguing that women's legitimacy stems from their special role as servants of God. Ultimately, this is Sulamī's contribution with the *Dhikr*: the idea that women have unique access to God through their gender.

Qushayrī's *Risāla*

Abū'l-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin al-Qushayrī (d. 1072) was the next scholar after Sulamī to include a collection of Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya's stories in his Ṣūfī manual, *Al-Risāla al-Qushayrīya fi 'ilm al-taṣawwuf*. This work takes a different approach than that of Sulamī's works in its handling of both Rābi'a and Dhū'n-Nūn. These characters emphasize advanced stages on the path to God, particularly their intimate relationship with Him, making them tenuous figures for Qushayrī, who is uncomfortable with describing such relationships for novices unprepared for such a connection with God. While this may have impacted the way each character is portrayed, it is likely that Qushayrī's portrayals of these figures were more greatly impacted by Sulamī's *Ṭabaqāt* and, in Rābi'a's case, by gender.

Before we can explore the impact of the themes in the work on Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya's portrayal, we must understand the life of Qushayrī.⁷³ Qushayrī was born in Nishapur in the year 986 CE. He received an excellent education, receiving training in the Arabic language, chivalry, and weaponry. Qushayrī's spiritual chain connects him to Sulamī, through Qushayrī's father-in-law and spiritual master, Abū 'Alī ad-Daqqāq (d. 1147-8).⁷⁴ Qushayrī was educated in Ash'arite theology and Shāfi'ī jurisprudence, which greatly influenced his work on his *Risāla*.⁷⁵ During his time, Nishapur fell under Seljuk control, which resulted in a struggle between the Ḥanafis

⁷³ For information about his life and analysis on his work see H. Halm, "al-Qushayrī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. ed. P. Bearman et al., (Brill Online, 2012), accessed April 7, 2015 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-kushayri-COM_0548.

⁷⁴ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 88.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

and the Shāfi'īs for supremacy in the region. Qushayrī became so ensnared in this struggle that he eventually became the leading champion of the Shāfi'ī-Ash'arite party of Nishapur.⁷⁶ The struggle between these groups briefly led to the Qushayrī's imprisonment. Shortly after his release, he visited Baghdad to hold *ḥadīth* sessions there on the invitation of the caliph al-Qā'im, and, upon his return, he was forced to settle in Ṭūs because Nishapur was under Ḥanafī control.⁷⁷ He eventually made his way back to Nishapur when he was seventy-nine (lunar) years old, and remained there until his death in 1072.

Qushayrī was a prolific author, and is attributed with writing more than twenty works, of which the most famous is his *Risāla*.⁷⁸ Although his background extends into many different areas of Islam, Qushayrī is widely known for popularizing Sufism. Throughout his works, Qushayrī highlights the idea that there is a group of God's elect 'friends,' or *awliyā'*, who are selected by God to receive intuitive knowledge of both God and His word.⁷⁹ Qushayrī had a clear idea of the follower's progression on the path toward understanding revelation, in which one moves from "the intellect to the heart (*al-qalb*), then to the spirit (*al-rūḥ*), then to the innermost secret (*as-sirr*), and, finally, to the secret of secrets (*sirr al-sirr*).⁸⁰ Thus, it is only through this advancement that people can approach different types of knowledge. This idea, that people can only comprehend certain types of knowledge regarding God and His revelation based upon their place along the path, is mirrored by his organization of the *Risāla*, which is written for

⁷⁶ Alexander Knysh, introduction to *Al-Qushayrī's Epistle on Sufism*, by Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (Reading: Garnet Pub, 2007), xxii.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, xxii.

⁷⁸ Jawid A. Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jami*. (Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 100.

⁷⁹ Knysh, introduction, xxiii.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

a general audience in the first two chapters, while the final two chapters are written for a specialized audience.

The *Risāla* is Qushayrī's magnum opus. It is apologetic in nature and has a clear objective: to depict Sufism as a "legitimate and respectable Islamic 'science' in complete harmony with the letter and spirit of Islamic Law, the Sharī'a."⁸¹ Qushayrī's searches for a balance between the Sharī'a and *ḥaqīqa*,⁸² which corresponds to his attempt to find a balance between *'ilm* and *ma'rifa*. During Qushayrī's time people emphasized *ḥaqīqa* and *ma'rifa* as a means of achieving oneness with God, provoking them to attempt practices that they lacked the spiritual maturity to withstand. These practices included dressing inappropriately, eating forbidden (*ḥarām*) foods, and making heretical statements in public. All of this prompted many non-Šūfī Muslims to believe that Sufism had divested itself from Islam. At the same time, traditional religious scholars often fell prey taking pride in the perfection of their religious practice, which led to developing an ego that inevitably became an obstacle blocking them from God. Advanced Šūfī masters responded to these issues by partaking in advanced practices, thereby ensuring that they would not participate in pious sanctimony or develop an ego. While these questionable practices had a purpose for these Šūfī masters, Qushayrī saw their misuse by those who lacked spiritual maturity as detrimental to the overarching Šūfī movement and as distracting people from participating in the lifestyle. Qushayrī's goal in the *Risāla* is to demonstrate that one can only participate in Sufism by grounding their practice in the Sunna.

The *Risāla* combines two literary genres characteristic of Šūfī writing: the *ṭabaqāt* and manual genres. *Ṭabaqāt* is a biographical genre indicative of Muslim authors. It is generally

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

⁸² *Ibid.*, xxiv.

organized chronologically and centers around the lives of notable figures in Islamic history, as in the work of Sulamī. In the *Risāla* of Qushayrī, these figures are famous Ṣūfī saints whose stories have been passed down for generations because of their contributions to the faith and their close relationship with God. Qushayrī's *ṭabaqāt* section contains a brief introduction, a series of short biographies on 83 Ṣūfī figures, and a short conclusion.

The manual genre essentially provides a set of guidelines for how people should live in order to follow a Ṣūfī lifestyle. This specifically includes a discussion of terminology used by Ṣūfīs and an explanation of all of the mystical states and stations along the Ṣūfī path. Between these two sections, Qushayrī outlines what it means to be a Ṣūfī, or, more specifically, how Ṣūfīs should live their lives.

In combining these genres Qushayrī breaks his *Risāla* into four sections. The first is a short introduction emphasizing Ash'arite theology, with the substance of the work in the following three sections. The next section is the *ṭabaqāt*, followed by a section listing and defining Ṣūfī terminology and another on the mystical stations. These final two chapters use technical terminology to describe Ṣūfī doctrine and lifestyle, underscoring the fact that they were written for a more advanced audience, while the earlier two sections are open to general readership due to their more inclusive writing style.⁸³ Qushayrī was very familiar with the issues stemming from more advanced Ṣūfī states, such as intimacy, *ma'rifa*, extreme asceticism, and the mystical, and reserved emphasizing these stages for the later sections of the *Risāla*.

Qushayrī relied heavily on Sulamī's *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīyya* for the organization of his work. This reliance dictated the organization of the *Risāla*, which includes only three biographies not

⁸³ Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism*, 101.

found in Sulamī's *Ṭabaqāt*, meaning that 80 out of 83 figures found in the *Risāla* are also in the *Ṭabaqāt*. Qushayrī was slightly more selective regarding who he would include in his *Risāla*, as he left out 23 people who were included in the *Ṭabaqāt*. Qushayrī also orders his biographies based on Sulamī's organization, primarily using a chronological and generational order.⁸⁴ However, Qushayrī does not use the *Ṭabaqāt* as a source of content for his *Risāla*, and so he adds many stories and passages that are not mentioned in Sulamī's book. The structural relationship between the two is notable because, as was previously mentioned, Sulamī did not include Rābi'a in his *Ṭabaqāt*, but instead used her entry as the opening chapter to his *Dhikr*. This provides a potential explanation as to why Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya is omitted from Qushayrī's *Risāla*: Qushayrī was simply following the path provided to him by Sulamī. This explanation is made more likely given the fact that Qushayrī was far more inclined to exclude Ṣūfī masters whom Sulamī included than to include new figures.

Unsurprisingly, Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya is completely omitted from Qushayrī's *ṭabaqāt* section. Qushayrī considered the figures included in his *ṭabaqāt* section to be the most important and venerable Ṣūfī saints, so Rābi'a's exclusion could also indicate that Qushayrī did not view her as being equal to as these other figures. Rābi'a is discussed sparingly in the later two sections of the *Risāla*, indicating that her character conveys ideas which are appropriate for those further along the path and capable of handling the abstract messages of Sufism without being distracted. To get an idea of what these messages were, one must study how Rābi'a is portrayed throughout the remainder of the *Risāla*, which will be examined in greater depth later in this essay.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

Qushayrī begins the *Risāla* by referencing its apologetic purpose and discussing the problems of Sufism, saying “This [Ṣūfī] path has been overcome by weakness, nay the path has in fact completely disappeared...they have thought little about committing sinful deeds. At the same time, they have availed themselves freely of the things they borrow from commoners, women, and rulers.”⁸⁵ This statement first explains the goal of the *Risāla*: to reestablish the validity of Sufism within the greater context of Islam, thereby making the general population more open to its message. To regain validity, the work emphasizes the ways in which Sufism is compatible with other, more widely accepted expressions of Islam and holds back the more confusing and abstract ideas in Sufism, saving them for a more discerning audience.

Qushayrī’s statement also reveals a bias against women, as he openly places women on the same plane as commoners and rulers.⁸⁶ Qushayrī states that people should not follow the practices of women, thereby ensuring that women cannot be leaders or teachers within their respective communities. More troubling, Qushayrī implies that following women leads to weakness and committing sinful deeds, thereby underscoring the idea that women are not men’s equals, but instead are a problem which men must overcome.

This viewpoint is supported by the complete lack of women in Qushayrī’s *ṭabaqāt* section, which also accounts for the general absence of women and their lower position throughout the remainder of his work. Furthermore, the material in the *ṭabaqāt* section is intended for a general readership, who may have been less open to female religious leaders,

⁸⁵ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 6.

⁸⁶ Rulers are often portrayed as being spiritually flawed and as having gone astray. As such, being put on the same plane as rulers in a Ṣūfī work demonstrates the degree of their debasement.

which could have contributed to the absence of female saints, particularly Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya in the beginning chapters, and the inclusion of Rābi‘a’s stories in the later chapters of the work.

Qushayrī’s depiction of Rābi‘a could have been impacted by such a preponderance of factors that it is impossible to attribute it to simply one. Overall, she is a controversial figure due to the themes she espouses and her gender, making her unpalatable for many outside of Sufism. With this in mind, we will examine her stories on their own before then placing those stories in the context of the rest of the work to get a greater understanding of Rābi‘a’s contribution to the text.

Rābi‘a in the Risāla

Most of Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s stories are organized so that they advance with readers as they move along their spiritual journey. He starts at the very beginning of a relationship with God, with a story in which Rābi‘a is asked by a man, “‘I have committed many sins and acts of disobedience. If I decide to turn to God, would He turn to me?’ She answered: ‘No. Only if He were to turn to you, then you would be able to turn to Him.’”⁸⁷ The beginning of any journey must begin with God selecting His follower to see Him. No act of repentance can be genuine unless God has enabled the person to repent. This underscores one of the fundamental ideas of Sufism: one must be utterly dependent upon God for all things in order to gain a true relationship with Him. Without God making the first step, this relationship is impossible.

⁸⁷ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 117.

The next story conveys the next roadblock along a spiritual journey: the physical world. Qushayrī explains, “Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya mended a tear in her shirt...She lost her heart for a while until she remembered [that episode]. She then ripped her shirt and rediscovered her heart.”⁸⁸ This is the only story that references that Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s complete devotion to God manifested itself in the rejection of the physical world. All other mention of her practice is omitted. The *Risāla* emphasizes the dangers of the physical world, as material things can lead to hubris and desires other than God. The story implies that Rābi‘a gained a sense of pride from her clothing that obscured her from God, and, upon this realization, she opted to tear it, thereby completing her humility rather than maintaining her clothing and developing an ego. This story serves as a warning, as it is better to live in a state of disarray and poverty than to be distracted by the temptations of the physical world.

Even when people avoid earthly distractions and maintain scrupulous practice, there are other distractions as they develop a relationship with God. These temptations come as people have begun their relationship with God, and being to encounter difficulties maintaining that relationship. One such example occurs when Qushayrī retells the story, “Someone asked Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya: ‘when will the servant [of God] be satisfied?’ She said, ‘when he rejoices at afflictions as much as he rejoices at bounty.’”⁸⁹ People have an easier time maintaining closeness to God when good things occur in their lives; however, as they face misfortune, it is easy to become distracted by these problems instead of focusing on their relationship with God. Rābi‘a’s solution to this is to view both afflictions and bounties as being equal as both come from God as an opportunity for some kind of spiritual growth.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 208.

Followers deepen their spiritual maturity and cease to be distracted by earthly struggles, they might come across a new distraction from God: fear of Hell or desire for Heaven. Qushayrī uses Rābi‘a’ al-‘Adawiyya’s stories to address this issue. Writing that Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya “fell ill, [and] someone asked her: ‘What is the cause of your illness?’ She answered: ‘My heart was attracted to Paradise, so He chastised me for that. However, He is benevolent [toward His servants].”⁹⁰ This story underscores the common theme throughout Rābi‘a’s narrative: that Paradise is a distraction for God’s followers, leading them to become more concerned with emphasizing proper practice as a means to reach Heaven. This leads them away from emphasizing proper practice as a means to achieving a greater relationship with God, thereby becoming an obstacle to this relationship.

Seemingly in answer to this idea, Qushayrī includes another of Rābi‘a’s stories in his section on love. He says, “In one of her intimate conversations with God, Rābi‘a [al-‘Adawiyya] said: ‘My God, can you burn with fire a heart that loves You?’ She heard a voice saying: ‘We have not done so. Do not think ill of Us!’” This is directly followed by Qushayrī’s own analysis, as he says “They say that [the word] ‘love’ (*ḥubb*) has two letters, *ḥa*’ and *ba*’ because one who is in love abandons both his spirit (*rūḥ*) and his body (*badan*).⁹¹ By noting that Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya had multiple conversations with God, Qushayrī lets the reader in, however briefly, on who Rābi‘a was and why she has earned a space in this text. Few people have even one intimate experience with God, and Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya is not only one of those people, but she also had numerous conversations with Him. God tells her directly that He would never condemn

⁹⁰ Meaning that God pardoned Rābi‘a.
Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 267.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 334.

someone to Hell if that person were completely devoted to Him, rather than sending an intermediary, marking her as one of His elect.

This story is directly followed by Qushayrī's explanation of love. True love necessitates abandoning the body and spirit, and the trappings of the physical and spiritual realms, and instead turning only toward God. This is Rābi'a's message throughout the *Risāla*: that there is no space for anything other than God in the hearts of His elect. This story is one of Rābi'a's final stories in this work, mirroring the fact that only those who had greatly progressed along the Ṣūfī path can reach such a state. This parallel follows the tendency of the *Risāla* to place Rābi'a's stories in the order that they would be relevant to practitioners as they try to make their way along the path.

Interestingly, Qushayrī omits most of the stories which emphasize Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya's extreme physical practices. This distinguishes Qushayrī's Rābi'a from other depictions of her, which emphasize the scrupulous physical practices which make her such a marvel and have enabled her relationship with God. Rābi'a's world is not justified, and there is no clarification as to what makes her stories so valuable, except that they themselves contain wisdom. Rābi'a is never an individual or even an agent in the *Risāla*. Instead she is one-dimensional, merely a symbol of the necessity of devotion to God without any of the depth necessary to put that devotion into context. This makes the ideas the ideas her stories espouse theoretical at best and only useful for those who are already members of the elect, and who have the spiritual depth and maturity necessary to apply said theory wisely.

However, the *Risāla* does acknowledge one aspect of Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya's character that is consistent with the majority of her depictions: her gender. Qushayrī writes:

It is related that Ṣāliḥ al-Murri used to say: ‘If one keeps knocking on the door persistently, it will eventually open for one.’ To this Rābi‘a [al-‘Adawiyya] responded, saying: ‘For how long will you continue saying this? Has the door ever been closed, so that one had to request that it be opened?’ Salih replied: ‘An old man[like myself] has been shown ignorance (*jāhila*), while a woman has shown [true] knowledge (‘*alimat*).’

Ṣāliḥ al-Murri⁹² (d. 778-9 or 792-3) is used in this instance to legitimize Rābi‘a as a source. He demonstrates the idea that, if Rābi‘a’s contributions are of value, then the fact that she is a woman should be of no importance. Thus, when she draws his attention to the fact the door had already been opened for him, he is able to grow and learn from her. The *Risāla* implicitly argues that Rābi‘a’s gender should not be held against her because of the value of her ideas themselves. Her gender ceases to hold her back because Rābi‘a has become a person with true wisdom, and therefore her contributions are of value. However, Rābi‘a is the exception to her gender, not the rule, and so Qushayrī cannot be said to depict women favorably.

Dhū’n-Nūn in the Risāla

The *Risāla* prioritizes its own message above maintaining the accuracy of the characters’ narratives, which is especially the case when examining the entry of Abū ‘l-Fayd Dhū’n-Nūn al-Misrī. Qushayrī omits the stories which discuss the miracles in which Dhū’n-Nūn participated or which he witnessed. Likewise, all mention of loving God or any discussion of *ma’rifā* is absent until the end of the work. This absence first becomes apparent in the *ṭabaqāt* section, which puts together a discordant, jumbled image of the character. Dhū’n-Nūn’s entry contains a brief

⁹² Ṣāliḥ al-Murri was a *ḥadīth* scholar who died in Baghdad.

introduction with a few of his biographical details, including that he had been accused of heresy, but that he appeared before the caliph al-Mutawakkil⁹³ whom Dhū'n-Nūn moved so greatly that the caliph cried and sent him home with honors.⁹⁴ Al-Qushayrī also describes Dhū'n-Nūn's physical appearance, noting that "he was a slim man with a light skin, whose beard was not white."⁹⁵ This description is important because Dhū'n-Nūn was a Nubian,⁹⁶ which meant that he would have been widely viewed as an outsider and as such would not have had the same place in society as his Arab peers.

After the introduction, al-Qushayrī turns to Dhū'n-Nūn's stories and sayings in his *ṭabaqāt* section, which emphasize two themes: the necessity of proper practice and the importance of repentance. This beginning section begins by focusing on the need for proper practice, which traditionally stems from careful study of the Sunna, and is rarely discussed in Western scholarship as being one of Dhū'n-Nūn's primary contributions to Sufism. In his first story, Dhū'n-Nūn's says, "Everything hinges on four things: the love of the Glorious One, the hatred of the insufficient,⁹⁷ the observance of the revealed,⁹⁸ and the fear of changing from one state to another.⁹⁹ Generally, Dhū'n-Nūn is known for emphasizing mystical themes, not the least of which is *ma'rifa*;¹⁰⁰ however, in this story there is no mention of the themes traditionally

⁹³ Al-Mutawakkil was a caliph during the 'Abbasid dynasty from 847 to 861.

⁹⁴ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 19.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁹⁶ Meaning that he was from the area surrounding the Nile River, what is today the area of Egypt and Sudan.

⁹⁷ Knysh explains this as being 'this life and its attractions.'

⁹⁸ Knysh explains this as being Divine Law.

⁹⁹ Knysh explains this as meaning a change from a virtuous state to a less perfect one. Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 20.

¹⁰⁰ He's also known for being the earliest figure to systematize the mystic way, including the states and stations along the path; self-discipline; renunciation; and rejection of the self, or Ego. Almost all of these ideas are topics which Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya is known for emphasizing as well.

associated with him. Instead, Dhū'n-Nūn emphasizes mundane ideas, particularly following the sunna, even emphasizing proper practice above an intimate relationship with God. This attitude prioritizes *'ilm*, which is the traditional approach to education that explains how one should follow the sunna, above mystical approaches, particularly *ma'rifa*, which is a kind of experiential knowledge that only God can grant His followers.

The second of Dhū'n-Nūn's stories further emphasizes the importance of following the Prophet's practice. Dhū'n-Nūn says, "'One of the signs of the lover of God is his following in the footsteps of God's beloved [ie: Muḥammad]--may God bless him and greet him--in his character traits, his deeds, his precepts and his customs.'"¹⁰¹ One cannot be a lover of God without following the Sunna, which is an essential part of the basis of Islamic law. As such, one must be familiar with the Sunna which can only be accessed through *'ilm*, in order to follow God's path. This idea underscores one of the main ideas in Qushayrī's work: Sufism is not only fully compatible with the Sharī'a, but the Sharī'a is a necessary facet of following the Ṣūfī path. Even though Dhū'n-Nūn is one of the more mystical figures in Sufism, Qushayrī still uses his character to underscore the overarching message of his work.

Qushayrī also includes the story of Dhū'n-Nūn's initial repentance,¹⁰² in which Dhū'n-Nūn says "'I wanted to go from [Fustat]¹⁰³ to a village in the countryside. I fell asleep in the desert, and when I opened my eyes I saw a small blind fledgling that fell from its nest onto the ground. [Suddenly] the earth was cleft and there appeared [from the crack] two food bowls, one

¹⁰¹ Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 20.

¹⁰² Specifically, this is the story of Dhū'n-Nūn's beginning his story along the path to God. Alexander D. Knysh notes that repentance is typically the first step of the Ṣūfī path. Interestingly, Sulamī does not include this story in his *Tadhkirat*, but 'Aṭṭār does. For the discussion of 'Aṭṭār's variation, see page 75 in this work.

¹⁰³ During Dhū'n-Nūn's time Fustat, now in southern Cairo, was the capital of Egypt.

silver and the other gold. In one there were sesame seeds, in the other water. (translator's insertion) The fledgling ate from one bowl and drank from the other. I cried out, 'This is enough for me. I have repented!' And I was waiting at God's door until He [agreed to] receive me"¹⁰⁴ (translator's insertion). Dhū'n-Nūn witnesses a miracle from God, which is sufficient cause for him to repent and begin to follow the Ṣūfī path. This version of the story is considerably shorter than other variations, and its primary purpose is to both identify Dhū'n-Nūn as one of God's elect, and mark repentance as the first step along the Ṣūfī path. This story does not add much by way of guidance as to how one should develop a relationship with God, but its mystical details, such making bowls appear from nothing, and the fact that the bowls are made of precious metals, add legitimacy to the character's status as one of God's elect.

The final story in Dhū'n-Nūn's biographical entry details the different approaches to repentance, identifying the nature of one's repentance as the difference between the commoner and God's elect. In the story, Dhū'n-Nūn says, "'The common people repent from [their] sins, whereas [God's] elect people repent from neglectfulness'"¹⁰⁵ (translator's insertion). Focusing on avoiding sin requires focusing on one's self, which means that the practitioner is not fully focusing on God. Not maintaining complete mindfulness and devotion requires repentance because the job of God's elect is to continuously maintain awareness of God. Because God grants His elect special knowledge and access to Him, they have a heightened responsibility to maintain their devotion to Him.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁰⁵ Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 20.

In addition to the *ṭabaqāt* section, Dhū'n-Nūn is included in the later two portions of the *Risāla*. These two sections are written for an audience who already familiar with the Ṣūfī way, which is mirrored by Dhū'n-Nūn's depiction in them. The first of Dhū'n-Nūn's entries is in Qushayrī's chapter on the mystical state. Dhū'n-Nūn explains about the [divine] gnostic, saying “‘He was here [a moment ago], but left’”¹⁰⁶ (translator's insertion). He explains that states, which are epistemic gifts from God, are extremely fleeting, and they cannot be accurately described to people who have not experienced them. This is the first story which refers to the more familiar portrayals of Dhū'n-Nūn, as it emphasizes *ma'rifa* (gnosis) and depicts a mystical, abstract character.

In al-Qushayrī's section on repentance, he repeats the story about Dhū'n-Nūn's distinction between the nature of repentance for common people and for God's elect, denoting the idea's importance.¹⁰⁷ This story is particularly important because repentance is such an early stage as one beings their relationship with God, and it also demonstrates how the responsibilities and goals of the practitioner differ depending on their relationship with God and their place on the Ṣūfī path. Later in the same chapter on the nature of repentance, al-Qushayrī writes that Dhū'n-Nūn said:

‘The true essence of repentance is that ‘the land for all its breadth [is] narrow for you’¹⁰⁸ so that you find no rest for you in it; then your own self becomes narrow for you, as God Most High has mentioned in His Book: ‘When the earth became narrow for them...and their souls became narrow for them, and they thought thee was no shelter from God except in Him, then He turned towards them, so that they might also turn.’¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 78.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁰⁸ Qur'ān, sura 9 verse 25.

¹⁰⁹ This references Qur'ān, sura 9 verse 118. Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 116.

This idea revises the traditional notion of repentance. Instead of regretting one's actions and feeling sorrow for past mistakes, repentance involves dissatisfaction with one's own self and seeking solace in God. It is predicated on God's turning toward the practitioner and allowing them to repent before the practitioner can turn to God. Thus, repentance is truly dedicating one's self to God.

Throughout the remainder of the work, many of Dhū'n-Nūn's stories emphasize the necessity of utter devotion to God. In his chapter on sincerity (*ikhhlās*), al-Qushayrī includes a story in which Dhū'n-Nūn says "Sincerity is to forget about creatures through constantly gazing on the Creator." Sincerity is predicated on devotion to God to the exclusion of the entirety of creation. All spheres of existence, the physical realm, the social realm, and the spiritual realm, distract from God, and one cannot be sincerely devoted to God while simultaneously admiring His creation. Al-Qushayrī further underscores this theme in his chapter on satisfaction. He writes that Dhū'n-Nūn said, "'There are three signs of satisfaction: giving up [your] free choice in anticipation of the [passing of] divine decree; feeling no bitterness after the decree has been passed; and [experiencing] the excitement of love [of God] in the middle of affliction'"¹¹⁰ (translator's insertion). Satisfaction comes from successfully devoting one's self as a servant of God in every way: the practitioner gives up their own desires in order to prioritize following God's command and maintains love for God in the face of tribulations because they cease to place value in themselves; all value comes from God.

¹¹⁰ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 208.

Overall this portrayal of Dhū'n-Nūn denies many of the defining aspects of his character, especially his emphasis on gnosis (*ma'rifa*), which al-Qushayrī only brings up toward the end of his work. In Dhū'n-Nūn's first story in the chapter on divine gnosis he says, “‘The person who knows God Most High is the most bewildered of all in regard to Him.’”¹¹¹ This hints at the abstract nature of *ma'rifa*: the one who is most connected to God and who has had direct knowledge of and experience with God is the one who fully understands just how little they understand about God. As people collect experiences of Him, they realize increasingly that they are unable to take in those experiences and grasp what is happening; God is beyond humans' ability to process. Later in this chapter, Dhū'n-Nūn explains the source of *ma'rifa*, saying, “‘I have come to know my Lord through my Lord. Were it not for my Lord, I would not have known Him.’”¹¹² God grants his followers *ma'rifa*, they cannot gain access to *ma'rifa* on their own, meaning that they have special knowledge which is reserved for them alone. This relationship is of the utmost value, so much so that Dhū'n-Nūn says that the only real punishment for the gnostic is that he “ceases the recollection of God.”¹¹³ *Ma'rifa* is the reward for people who advance along the Ṣūfī path, and so is reserved for God's elect. These people have completely given themselves over to God, and being denied Him is far worse than any other possible punishment.

In his last discussion of Dhū'n-Nūn, al-Qushayrī writes that he said, “‘The gnostic is distinguished by three [signs]: the light of his gnosis does not extinguish the light of his piety; he does not adhere to an inner knowledge that may contradict an outward [religious] injunction; and

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 322.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 323.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 323.

the plenitude of divine graces does not push him towards violating any of Gods prohibitions-- may He be exalted”¹¹⁴ (translator’s insertion). This passage underscores al-Qushayrī’s main point: Sufism, even in its more abstract form, is in perfect harmony with the Sunna and the Sharī‘a. Having intimate knowledge of God might alter the way one interacts with the physical realm, but it is not an excuse to violate God’s law.

Finally, later in the *Risāla*, al-Qushayrī includes a story in which Dhū’n-Nūn discusses love (*maḥabba*). He says, “Refrain from this issue! If your souls fail to understand it properly, they might lay claims to it.” Next, al-Qushayrī recited:

Fear and sadness are better for the evildoer, when he practices devotion, While love is appropriate for the one who fears God and is free from any defilement.¹¹⁵

Fear and sadness imply that the practitioner fully understands his place of subservience to God, whereas love can open the door to an ego. This makes love potentially dangerous, whereas fear and and sadness are always safe. People cannot properly love God unless they have complete freedom from distraction and obstacles between them and God.

Al-Qushayrī’s primary concern is in writing a book that is useful for all readers, including novices, and ensuring that more advanced information will not tempt beginners to be distracted. This goal alters Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s and Dhū’n-Nūn’s portrayals throughout the *Risāla*. Both Rābi‘a and Dhū’n-Nūn make controversial figures because of their outsider status, though Rābi‘a’s outsider status is more problematic than Dhū’n-Nūn’s, and because they had a deeply intimate relationship with God. These elements all contributed to these characters’ portrayals, and likely caused the omission of many of their stories. However, because Rābi‘a is a more

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 324-326.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 333.

controversial figure than Dhū'n-Nūn, particularly because of her gender, Qushayrī minimizes her character while exploring the more abstract, advanced aspects of Dhū'n-Nūn's relationship with God.

Qushayrī's depiction of both Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and Dhū'n-Nūn is vastly different from the Western construction of these characters, even though al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* is a major source for many later works. This means that the author's intention in writing the *Risāla* had as much if not more impact on the contents of the work than the stories themselves. Additionally, it is clear that abstract elements of these characters' narratives had a major part in shaping the organization of the work, the degree to which each character is portrayed, and the character's actual portrayal in and of itself. As a result, in the case of The *Risāla*, we see that Qushayrī eschews maintaining historical accuracy regarding the character's narratives in favor of conveying his apologetic message in defense of Sufism.

‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*’

The third early work which extensively discusses both Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya and Dhū’n-Nūn is Farīd ad-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat al-awliyā*. This work differs greatly from the *Ṭabaqāt* and the *Risāla*, particularly because the *Tadhkirat* is a literary work while the other two works attempt to be historical sources. The difference in genre enables ‘Aṭṭār to emphasize the abstract concepts that Sulamī and Qushayrī avoid due to the fact they could potentially confuse the novice Ṣūfī. Throughout the *Tadhkirat*, ‘Aṭṭār uses Rābi‘a and Dhū’n-Nūn to convey controversial themes including *ma’rifā*, intimacy with God, annihilation of the self, and performing miracles. In his chapter on Rābi‘a, ‘Aṭṭār argues that some women can transcend their physical gender, becoming men in the physical or social sphere, enabling them to make essential contributions to Sufism. He also includes stories which underscore Rābi‘a’s ability to tap into her womanhood in the spiritual and emotional spheres to gain an intimate relationship with God. This ability demonstrates that Rābi‘a’s minority status is the major source of her power in the context of Sufism. ‘Aṭṭār continues this theme in his chapter on Dhū’n-Nūn, who is the only saint with a similarly intimate relationship with God in the work, and who also exists at the periphery of society. These two figures together form a whole. They illustrate the nuances of maintaining closeness with the Real while simultaneously connecting that relationship to humility derived from their minority status. ‘Aṭṭār, like Sulamī and al-Qushayrī, only problematizes gender, implying that gender, not race, is an obstacle in a relationship with God.

Although he is one of the most influential Persian Šūfī writers, not much is known about Farīd ad-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s life.¹¹⁶ Like many characters explored in his works, his story is a mixture of legend and fact. It was popularly held that when ‘Aṭṭār met the child Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, he gave him a book and predicted his success. While this is technically possible, according to Paul Losensky, Franklin Lewis has shown that there is no evidence in support of these stories.¹¹⁷ Through careful study a few details of ‘Aṭṭār’s life have come to light. The exact date of his birth is unknown, but he lived approximately 1150-1225. He spent the entirety of his life in Nishapur, and his death date is unknown.¹¹⁸ This date has been confused by differing accounts of his death. Some sources maintain that he was killed by invading Mongols or infidels, and later sources claim he was killed due to his divine love, either by orthodox Muslims or by infidels.¹¹⁹ The veracity of these accounts is open to question, as they were created with the intention of adding to ‘Aṭṭār’s legend.

Farīd ad-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s most famous work is *The Conference of the Birds*. This work is one of the highest examples of Persian poetry due to its advanced structure, use of clever word play and symbolism, and Šūfī themes. Another of ‘Aṭṭār’s important works is the *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*, which is a collection of Šūfī saints’ biographies in Persian. This work is intended to be a literary hagiography, consisting of parables and sayings about God’s elect. As a result, and as

¹¹⁶ ‘Aṭṭār’s works include Farīd ad-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (London: Penguin Books, 2001); Farīd ad-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *Farīd ad-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s Memorial of God’s Friends: Lives and Sayings of Šūfīs*, trans. Paul Losensky (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2009), whose introduction includes extensive biographical information about ‘Aṭṭār. For additional biographical information on ‘Aṭṭār, see H. Ritter, “‘Aṭṭār,” In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al., (Brill Online, 2012), accessed April 7, 2015 http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/Aṭṭār-COM_0074.

¹¹⁷ Losensky, introduction, 8.

¹¹⁸ The most widely accepted death date is April 1221, but there is evidence that he may have lived until 1229 or even 1230.

¹¹⁹ Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions in Islam*, 303.

Annemarie Schimmel points out, other sources must be used to fill in the historical facts of the stories in ‘Aṭṭār’s work.¹²⁰ The lack of interest in historical accuracy is underscored by ‘Aṭṭār’s intentional exclusion include the *isnāds* of his stories, which obfuscates his source material. Rather than maintaining historical accuracy, ‘Aṭṭār’s interest lies in exploring higher spiritual truths. In his introduction to the work, ‘Aṭṭār the motives behind his writing, culminating with:

Another motive is that these are the best of words in several regards. First, they make people’s hearts cold to this world. Second, they make the mind dwell continually on the afterworld. Third, they bring out the love of the Real in people’s hearts. Fourth, when people hear this sort of discourse, they begin to prepare provisions for the endless road.¹²¹

‘Aṭṭār’s primary goal is to inspire readers, help them kindle more intense devotion to God, and push them to improve their practice. In other words, ‘Aṭṭār’s goal is to inspire the reader to gain a deeper relationship with God, while simultaneously connecting his audience to the great Muslim saints of the past. Because the historical facts might distract from or undermine these goals, they were given secondary importance within the *Tadhkirat*.

In addition to omitting the *isnāds* of his stories, ‘Aṭṭār does not explicitly mention the written sources he used in the *Tadhkirat*. He used at least twelve sources, focusing on three in particular. First is Abū ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Sulamī’s *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfīyya*, from which ‘Aṭṭār took both the structure of his *Tadhkirat* and much of his material. The second, and possibly most important, source is the *Risāla* by Abū’l Qāsim al-Qushayrī. The *Risāla* was translated into Persian shortly after it was written, and it was probably one of the earliest Ṣūfī works to initiate ‘Aṭṭār to the Ṣūfī way. Finally, ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān Hujwārī’s (d. 1072-77) *Kashf al-maḥjūb* is a

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹²¹ Losensky, introduction, 45.
‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat*, 45.

central source for ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat*, and it is of particular note because Hujwīrī is from Ghazna, Afghanistan, and died in Lahore, but also lived briefly in Khurasan and also wrote in Persian.¹²² All three of these works helped inform ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat*, including his portrayals of Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya and Dhū’n-Nūn.

Rābi‘a in Tadhkirat: A shift toward gender

‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat* is one of the most important sources on the reader on Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s narrative, as it is used in most later hagiographies. Moreover, the text is relied upon in Western scholarship more than any other hagiography. ‘Aṭṭār forwards a complex portrayal of Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya, particularly regarding gender. In his introduction to his chapter on Rābi‘a ‘Aṭṭār makes a case for the place of women in Sufism; however, he argues that they can only travel along the Ṣūfī path if they forgo their gender and become male.¹²³ ‘Aṭṭār begins his introduction arguing in favor of the inclusion of women and their contributions to the Ṣūfī faith, writing “the Master of the Prophets (peace and blessings be upon him) declares: *God does not regard your forms*. It is not a matter of form but of right intention.”¹²⁴ A person’s value in Ṣūfism should not be disregarded because that person is a woman. Rābi‘a is as legitimate an inclusion in ‘Aṭṭār’s memorial as any male saint, demonstrating that there is space for women to be respected leaders in Sufism. ‘Aṭṭār furthers this point when he writes, “If it is right to derive two-thirds of religion from ‘A’asha-ye Sadeqa (God be pleased with her), then it is also right to

¹²² Losensky, introduction, 15.

¹²³ This passage has been greatly discussed in the secondary source material. For example, see Heidi, *Hierarchical Inversions, Divine Subversions*, 6; Annemarie Schimmel, “Women in Mystical Islam” in *Women’s Studies International Forum* 5, no. 2 (1982), 145-151.

¹²⁴ ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat*, 97.

derive benefit from one of his maidservants.”¹²⁵ This passage connects Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya with the greatest of her female predecessors, ‘A’isha, who was one of the Prophet’s wives and is responsible for transmitting a huge number of prophetic *ḥadīth*. In so doing, she preserved a large portion of Islamic history. ‘Aṭṭār’s also points out the hypocrisy of ignoring someone on the basis of their gender, when two-thirds of Islamic history and much of the legal system stems from a woman.

However, while ‘Aṭṭār argues that women should be allowed a space in Islam, he says that only women who can transcend their gender and become male are worthy of this space. His preceding argument for including Rābi‘a among his biographies is not that she should be included *qua* female, but that because God does not devalue her because of her womanhood, the reader should not as well. ‘Aṭṭār underscores this idea, adding, “In unity, how can the existence of ‘me’ and ‘you’ remain, much less ‘man’ and ‘woman’?”¹²⁶ This quotation appears to argue that the labels of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are pointless when one connects with God; however, this discussion is never referenced when ‘Aṭṭār discusses a male Ṣūfī. This is even the case with Dhū’n-Nūn, who was a Nubian, meaning that Dhū’n-Nūn also had outsider status. ‘Aṭṭār never argues in favor of ignoring other minority statuses, such as poverty, except Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s case, where he quotes Abū ‘Alī of Farmad as saying “Prophecy is the essence of might and sublimity. Noble or common do not enter into it.”¹²⁷ ‘Aṭṭār’s argument in favor of ignoring the outer form is only fully realized in his characterization of Rābi‘a, and this is

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹²⁷ ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat*, 97.

because being a “man” is understood as being the ‘zero-gender’ or the norm, while one must ignore the exterior form when the person is a woman, as is the case with Rābi‘a.

‘Aṭṭār underscores this idea when he says, “When a woman is a man on the path of the Lord most high, she cannot be called a woman.”¹²⁸ In this passage, a woman who devotes herself to becoming closer to God, she is stripped of her gender, and so is able to be treated as a man. Her closeness to God leads her to forfeit her traditional gender, making her a role model for the Muslim community.

‘Aṭṭār provides an additional example of the de-gendering of extraordinary women in Islam when he relates the story of ‘Abbāsa of Ṭūs, who said, “When on the morrow on the plain of resurrection they call out, ‘O men,’ the first person to step into the ranks of men will be Mary.”¹²⁹ Even Mary ceases to self-identify as a woman, acknowledging by stepping forward that her new status of a man. ‘Aṭṭār’s characterization of Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya simply follows the precedent set out by Mary.

‘Aṭṭār legitimizes his inclusion of Rābi‘a’s chapter in his work by discussing the esteemed men who respected her. He references her relationship with Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, saying he “would not hold a prayer meeting unless [Rābi‘a] were present, [so] certainly that person’s

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 97. This sentence has been used in secondary source materials to argue that ‘Aṭṭār is vehemently opposed to women in Sufism. For an example of this discourse, see Ford, “Hierarchical Inversions, Divine Subversions,” 6. Annemarie Schimmel has a slightly different interpretation of this passage, as she holds that the word ‘man’ is commonly used in religious passages to refer to the perfect human being. This interpretation is being rejected because it does not match the tone of the overall passage. For a more in-depth discussion read Schimmel, “Women in Mystical Islam,” 151.

¹²⁹ ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat*, 97.

memorial can be entered in the ranks of men.”¹³⁰ Even after demonstrating that women have a place in Islam, ‘Aṭṭār still justifies Rābi‘a’s inclusion on the basis of another man’s opinion of her, rather than acknowledging her in her own right. This justification is punctuated at the end of ‘Aṭṭār’s introduction to the chapter, as he says, “She was esteemed by the eminent people of the age and was a decisive proof for those who lived in her time.”¹³¹ Rābi‘a may have earned her place with God by her incredible conduct and realization, but her place in Islamic history comes from the esteem granted her by her male peers, while these peers do not require the same justification for their place in history.

‘Aṭṭār’s introduction is of particular note because it is entirely his own work. Unlike most of the *Tadhkirat*, in which he compiled the stories with occasional edits, this introduction is solely his voice, meaning that the introduction emphasizes the themes he finds most important. ‘Aṭṭār’s argument is that women should have a place in the context of Islam, but that place is predicated on their ability to act as a man and abandon their own gender. Because this is what ‘Aṭṭār chooses to talk about, it is clear that this is a central argument in his chapter on Rābi‘a.

Interestingly, Rābi‘a’s stories provide a very different image of gender than that in ‘Aṭṭār’s introduction. On the surface these stories take the same approach as the introduction, as Rābi‘a’s character does many things which undercut her gender, particularly refusing to marry, which was a refusal of her place in society as a woman. However, these actions only undercut the physical dimensions of womanhood. Rābi‘a’s success as a Ṣūfī comes from her utter devotion to God. This devotion stems from her womanhood, as her status as a woman forces her

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

to be a peripheral figure in her community. Rābi‘a taps into her peripheral status to deepen her relationship with God, and so it is her gender that gives her direction along the Ṣūfī path.

‘Aṭṭār’s portrayal of Rābi‘a repeatedly addresses her refusal to marry, understood as a rejection of her status as a woman, by including multiple stories in which her male interlocutors ask her repeatedly about her refusal to marry.¹³² In Islamic society during this time, a woman’s primary contributions to her community stemmed from her position as a member of a family. By being a wife and a mother, women fulfilled their societal role and were able to gain status for themselves and their families. As such, Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s decision not to marry or have sex cut her off from participating in society in her capacity as a woman. These stories give the appearance that Rābi‘a is not acting as a female actor, but instead finding a way to circumvent her own gender in order to find her way to God.

However, this understanding only recognizes the physical aspects of womanhood, while ignoring the spiritual and emotional aspects. In these stories Rābi‘a connects to her womanhood on a much deeper level, gaining a uniquely intimate relationship with God through her gender. ‘Aṭṭār addresses this issue with his inclusion of a story in which Ḥasan al-Baṣrī¹³³ (d. 728) asks Rābi‘a if she is interested in marriage. She answers, “‘The marriage knot can only tie one who exists. Where is existence here? I am not my own--I am his and under the shadow of his command. You must ask permission from him.’” When asked about how she gained this rank, she answered “‘by losing in him everything I’d attained.” Then she was asked how she knew

¹³² For examples, see ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat*, 104 and 105.

¹³³ Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was known for both his juridical contributions and also for his contributions to the mystical way. As he died in 728 AD, it is unlikely that Ḥasan al-Baṣrī ever met Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya, and so the stories between them are almost certainly works of fiction. For more information on Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s life, see H. Ritter, “Ḥasan al-Baṣrī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al., (Brill Online, 2012), accessed April 7, 2015. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/hasan-al-basri-COM_0273.

him, ““You know the how. We the no-how.””¹³⁴ Rābi‘a is uninterested in marriage because God is her only master, thereby implying that she views herself as married to God. However, earthly marriage is too trivial to describe her relationship with God because she loses herself completely in Him. Rābi‘a maintains her gender, but on a higher plane--denying it in the physical world and instead participating in it as she draws deeper into God. Traditional marriage cannot be applied to God’s chosen people, as marriage shifts people’s attention away from God and toward their spouse and the physical realm. This paradigm is not appropriate for God’s elect--they belong to Him so much so that they lack the ability even to be contained in themselves. The self disappears until only God remains.

In another story, Rābi‘a portrays her womanhood as an essential force in her relationship with God. A group of men visit her and ask her, ““All the virtues have been dispersed among men. The crown of nobility has been placed upon the heads of men, and the belt of magnanimity has been tied around their waists. Prophecy has never descended upon any woman. What do you have to boast of?”” She answers, ““Everything you said is true. But egoism, egotism, self-worship, and *I am your highest lord*¹³⁵ have not welled up in any woman. And no woman has ever been a pederast.””¹³⁶ Women have access to a unique relationship with God because they are live at the periphery of society. They do not receive access to education, they are not permitted positions in the public sphere, and they are not leaders in their communities. In most instances their voices are silenced. Even Rābi‘a is not portrayed in the *Tadhkirat* as a respected leader, as the men who visit her in this story aim to challenge her rather than learn from her.

¹³⁴ ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat*, 104.

¹³⁵ This is the wording that the Pharaoh uses when he orders his men to follow him in Qur’ān 79:24.

¹³⁶ ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat*, 110.

However, this is exactly the strength of being a woman: women do not have a fully developed ego, and so can handle those challenges without involving the self. The lack of ego also enables women to be more capable of submitting to and developing intimacy with God, because they do not place value on themselves. Just as al-Sulamī implies in his *Dhikr*, women's path to God is connected to their unique ability to devote themselves completely to serving God.

Because women rarely received formal education, traditional religious study was not available to them in the same way that submission and intimacy were. As a result, Rābi'a relied on her womanhood to find her path to God. In the same manner, submission generally became a path to God for women who did not have access to the same education as their male counterparts, and so they were not tempted by the world of formal education with its constructions, social hierarchies, and egotism. Men likewise have access to major areas of Islam which are cut off from women because they interact with God in a way utterly different from their female counterparts. However, men do not have the same relationship with God because they live in the realm of traditional scholarship and have emphasized the ego from the beginning of their lives, so they are tempted by religious sanctimony and intellectual distractions not available to women. Thus according to 'Aṭṭār, Sufism allows women a unique avenue to God and a place in the faith that is not available to men in the same way.

Ultimately, 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat* forwards a complicated image of gender. 'Aṭṭār begins by arguing in his introduction that women must act like men in the physical realm in order to make their way along the Ṣūfī path. However, the section containing Rābi'a's stories demonstrates that even without the physical realm women are able to participate in their gender as a means of deepening their relationship with God in a way that is not available to men. This means that

women have the capacity to be the spiritual equals of their male counterparts, although they still must navigate the stereotypical societal institutional entrapments for women, particularly marriage, that make that process more difficult.

Ma'rifa: A Major Theme in 'Aṭṭār's Depiction of Rābi'a

After 'Aṭṭār's introduction, Rābi'a's chapter begins with the story of her birth and early childhood, which contain instances of her performing miracles and emphasize her rejection of everything except God. This unified devotion is later viewed as Rābi'a's primary contribution to Sufism. However, in 'Aṭṭār's work it connects her to a deep intimacy that encompasses every aspect of her life. Rābi'a has direct experiences with God, thereby implying that she has access to *ma'rifa*, which is understood as being the "kind of intimate experience possible only through a personal relationship with God."¹³⁷ Rābi'a's stories emphasize her relationship with God which was created by her complete physical and mental devotion to God, thereby underscoring the importance of developing intimacy as the practitioner makes their way down the Path. Intimacy and *ma'rifa* are never explicitly discussed in Rābi'a's stories; however, her stories describe her journey down the Ṣūfī Path by highlighting themes that are integral to developing a close personal connection to God by developing humility within one's self.

¹³⁷ John Renard, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2004), 21. This idea was first forwarded by the Ṣūfī master Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Hārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857). He discusses this theory in *The Book of Knowledge*, in which he describes three kinds of knowledge: outward understanding of what is law. Similarly, Ḥakīm at-Tirmidhī (d. 908) argued in *The Book of Elucidation of Knowledge* that *ma'rifa* is experiential knowledge of God and His actions. For him, *ma'rifa* was integrally connected to mindfulness of God. For more information on this, see Renard, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism*, 24-26.

This unified devotion to God is later described as being Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s primary contribution to Sufism as well as the source for much of her interaction with God. ‘Aṭṭār even notes that her devotion was so extreme that she “had no like in proper conduct or realization.”¹³⁸ According to ‘Aṭṭār, Rābi‘a’s real contribution is her servitude, which enables her to become appropriately humble and devoted to God. Most importantly, her practice and servitude is so advanced that it is the source of her intimacy with God.

Because Rābi‘a is so close to God she interacts directly with Him. In one instance, when Rābi‘a performs the Ḥajj she becomes stranded, and she says ““My God, I am sore at heart. Where am I going? I am a clod of earth, and that house is a rock. I must have you.”” God responds by speaking directly to Rābi‘a’s heart, saying, ““You wash in the blood of eighteen thousand worlds. Don’t you see that when Moses (peace be upon him) desired a vision, we cast a few motes of epiphany upon the mountain, and it shattered into forty pieces!”¹³⁹ In this story God speaks directly to Rābi‘a in order to keep her from losing heart in one of the few instances where she falters. This leads to the obvious question--why would God favor Rābi‘a in this way when there are so many people who falter similarly?

The answer to this question hints at the key to servitude; namely: utter devotion and dependence on God. When Rābi‘a begins her pilgrimage the donkey, which was carrying all her provisions, dies. The other members of her caravan offer to help carry her things, but she refuses them, saying that she has not depended on them so far for her journey, and she would not start then. They leave her, and she cries out to God. Shortly thereafter, He brings her donkey back to

¹³⁸ ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat*, 97.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

life so that she can complete her journey.¹⁴⁰ Rābi‘a’s interactions with God are made possible by her single-minded dependence and devotion to God. Her love is so complete that it leads Rābi‘a to strand herself in the desert to die unless God steps in on her behalf. Rābi‘a’s act should not be misconstrued as an attempt to exert power over God and force Him to act; instead, it should be understood as Rābi‘a’s willingness to depend solely on God, even if it results in her death. This devotion is so extreme that it is almost a miracle in and of itself, leading God to grant Rābi‘a divine experiences of His divinity. This is a metaphor for the nature of servitude and intimacy: God allows His lovers experiences of Him and His divinity after they push themselves beyond traditional learning, and embed God in their hearts and their minds.

One would generally build a relationship with God by following traditional methods; particularly through *‘ilm*, which teaches people to submit to God by following the Sunna, necessitating knowledge of the Sharī‘a. As such, it is incorrect to say that Sufism is opposed to Sharī‘a or *‘ilm*. Instead, Sufism maintains that there are multiple ways to approach God, which emphasize the Sunna to varying degrees, and which sometimes exist outside the normal bounds of society.

According to ‘Aṭṭār, Rābi‘a was one such saint who took part in practices that were outside the bounds of the normal societal structures. He includes a story also found in Sulamī’s *Ṭabaqāt*, in which she meets with Sufyān ath-Thawrī, who asks her to comment on his state. She responds by saying, “‘You are a good man, but isn’t it the case that you love this world?’” He asks her to explain, and she says, “‘By reciting *ḥadīths*,’ meaning that this, too, is a sort of pomp. Sufyān said, ‘I have been lax.’”¹⁴¹ Rābi‘a’s relationship to God began with her devotion and

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

submission, as opposed to traditional learning. As such, Rābi‘a argues that emphasis on traditional learning, namely, *ḥadīth* recitation, distract people from God, as it becomes the goal in and of itself rather than a way of gaining closeness with Him. Eventually *‘ilm* ceases to be useful, and submission and devotion become necessary to move beyond *‘ilm* and gain an intimate relationship with God.

Dhū’n-Nūn in the Tadhkirat

Rābi‘a is not the only character who enjoys this extraordinarily intimate relationship with God in the *Tadhkirat*. ‘Aṭṭār also explores the importance of devoted love in creating an intimate relationship with God in his portrayal of Dhū’n-Nūn. Moreover, like Rābi‘a, Dhū’n-Nūn also exists at the periphery of society, and it is implied that his submission to and devotion to God is connected to his minority status. With this in mind, this section will explore Dhū’n-Nūn’s chapter in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat* and compare it against Rābi‘a’s chapter. Because the ideas espoused by these two figures are so similar, Dhū’n-Nūn serves as the best figure to test whether ‘Aṭṭār’s depiction of these two figures actually allows Rābi‘a al-‘Adawīyya a space in the Ṣūfī narrative that is equal to that of her male counterparts.

‘Aṭṭār takes a very different approach in his writing about Dhū’n-Nūn, largely because of the difference in the characters’ genders. Rābi‘a and Dhū’n-Nūn represent similar themes, such as undivided devotion to God, the emphasis of the mystical, and the importance of submission. Additionally, these characters differentiate themselves from the other saints in ‘Aṭṭār’s work because of their intimate relationship with God. However, Dhū’n-Nūn’s stories depict

considerably more outrageous miracles than those of Rābi‘a, including stories where he makes jewels appear out of thin air or calls fish to him. Finally, Dhū’n-Nūn’s stories emphasize a mental relationship and approach to God, while Rābi‘a’s stories prioritize emotion above all else.

‘Aṭṭār begins the *Tadhkirat* by addressing the idea that Dhū’n-Nūn was a controversial figure, saying that he was the “leader in seeking the public’s blame” which led to “most of the people of Egypt [calling] him a heretic...as long as he was alive, everyone was skeptical of him. So thoroughly did he conceal himself that no one was aware of his true state until he died.”¹⁴² Dhū’n-Nūn was the earliest figure to recognize *ma‘rifa* as a category of knowledge that is separate from *‘ilm*. Furthermore, Dhū’n-Nūn emphasized the necessity of *ma‘rifa* in moving along the Ṣūfī path, and it was this emphasis on *ma‘rifa* as opposed to *‘ilm* that led him to be viewed as controversial and potentially heretical.

In addition to *ma‘rifa*, Dhū’n-Nūn’s character emphasizes many of the same themes as Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s character in the *Tadhkirat*, including the importance of humility, self-discipline, poverty, the incomprehensibility of God, and the necessity of complete devotion to God. The difference between the two characters lies in their depiction. Rābi‘a is portrayed as being almost mundane when compared to Dhū’n-Nūn, which likely stems from the characters’ difference in gender.

Dhū’n-Nūn is a more extreme representation of the ideas discussed in Rābi‘a’s chapter, particularly the mental aspects of an intimate relationship with God. Among those is *ma‘rifa*, which he holds is a necessity in one’s journey along the Ṣūfī path. ‘Aṭṭār underscores this idea, writing that “in his private devotions [Dhū’n-Nūn] would constantly repeat, ‘O Lord, do not

¹⁴² Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat*, 164.

torment me with the disgrace of the veil.’”¹⁴³ Veils are a symbol for ignorance of God in the Ṣūfī tradition, and so this statement reveals that Dhū’n-Nūn’s greatest concern is maintaining his relationship with God. This maintenance is predicated on knowledge of God. ‘Aṭṭār’s story reveals that the only way for humans to gain divine knowledge is for God to give it to them. Not knowing God is a kind of disgrace in this context, as it is a sign of imperfections in one’s practice and religious devotion.

This theme is further emphasized in Dhū’n-Nūn’s conversion story.¹⁴⁴ Dhū’n-Nūn hears about a devout recluse, and so he seeks him out. He sees the recluse hanging his body from a tree and reprimanding his body for its desire to associate with people, saying “‘Haven’t you realized that if you mix with people, everything else [namely, sin] follows?’”¹⁴⁵ He then tells Dhū’n-Nūn that there is another, better ascetic who is up a mountain. Dhū’n-Nūn climbs the mountain, and sees the ascetic, who lives in a meditation cell. One foot had crossed outside the door of his cell, and so he cut it off. Dhū’n-Nūn asks about it, and the ascetic explains that he had seen a woman, and so he had set a foot outside of his cell to go after her. He then realized his error, and cut off the offending foot that had distracted him from God. He then tells Dhū’n-Nūn a true believer lives at the top of the mountain, and that Dhū’n-Nūn should visit him.

Dhū’n-Nūn is unable to climb the mountain, and so he asks about the Ṣūfī master. He hears that this man was once told that he needed sustenance, and so he vowed to eat nothing from the created world. Numerous days went by, and he refused to eat, so God sent him bees and he survived from their honey.

¹⁴³ Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat*, 175.

¹⁴⁴ This story is also in Qushayrī’s *Risāla*, and is discussed in this work on page 52.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 164.

Upon hearing this, Dhū'n-Nūn realizes that he should solely depend on God. He encounters a blind bird in a tree, and wonders how the bird finds food. The bird then “flew down from the tree, struck its beak against the ground, and two bowls appeared--one of gold, and one of silver, one filled with sesame seeds and the other with rose water. The bird ate the sesame seeds and drank the rose water and flew back to the tree. The bowls vanished. When [Dhū'n-Nūn] saw all that, all at once [he] felt the confidence to trust in God.”¹⁴⁶

This story is important because it outlines the Ṣūfī path. Followers begin by isolating themselves, as other people cause sin and distraction from the Real. Second, the story emphasizes the need for absolute rejection of sinful desire. Third, the story demonstrates the ultimate goal of the lover of God: complete reliance on God. This reliance can lead to the miraculous, which can only be explained by God's intervention. As people progress along the way, God reveals aspects of Himself, thereby sustaining the elect and deepening their understanding of the Real. The themes of devotion to and dependence on God are also the major themes espoused by Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya, and are deepened in 'Aṭṭār's depiction of Dhū'n-Nūn.

Like Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya,¹⁴⁷ Dhū'n-Nūn emphasizes the idea that heaven and hell are distractions from God. Dhū'n-Nūn describes a dream in which humanity is separated into ten parts, nine-tenths of which embrace this world. The remaining tenth is divided again into ten parts, of whom nine-tenths turn to paradise. The remaining tenth is divided a third time into ten parts, of whom nine-tenths run away for fear of hell. To the last tenth God says, “You are my servants! You did not look at this world and did not hope for paradise and did not fear hell.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 107, 109, 113.

What do you seek?’ They lower their heads and say, ‘You teach us what we desire. You know what we want.’”¹⁴⁸

‘Aṭṭār emphasizes that there are different conditions along the Ṣūfī Path. First, people must deny themselves all worldly pleasures and temptation, which block people from God. Next the people must defend against those things which specifically tempt them from their devotion to God. In the third condition, God’s elect refuse all forms of temptation and distraction, as well as dependence on anything other than God. This state of existence is so far removed beyond the realm of the mundane that people begin to experience miracles which give them direct insight into the Real, or *ma‘rifa*. *Ma‘rifa* is then an indicator of intimacy with God. This realization is signified in Dhū’n-Nūn’s conversion story by the miracle of the bird, which Dhū’n-Nūn witnesses only after he ascertains the import of this kind of devotion. Moreover, the importance of complete devotion in one’s faith is further underscored in the last line of the story in which God’s chosen refuse to be distracted by Heaven and Hell, when He asks what they want they answer, “You teach us what we desire. You know what we want.” God offers them any desire, and they turn the offer back to Him, asking Him to tell them what they want. Thus, these people depend on God for all things, even their desires, helping them avoid distractions.

This idea is repeated much more succinctly later in ‘Aṭṭār’s chapter on Dhū’n-Nūn, when he says, “‘There is a lesser and a greater path...If you desire the lesser path, bid farewell to sin, farewell to his world, and farewell to lust. If you desire the greater path, abandon everything other than the Real and empty your heart of all things.’”¹⁴⁹ God should not merely take primacy and supremacy in one’s heart; that true worship of God leaves room for nothing else.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

Acceptance of this truth causes Dhū'n-Nūn's interlocutor to follow the Ṣūfī Path and eventually become one of the Substitutes.¹⁵⁰ This story implies that it was the cultivation of a close, devoted relationship with God that enabled this figure to gain this position, thereby becoming almost Godly himself.

Dhū'n-Nūn and Rābi'a: A Comparison

There are two major differences between the depictions of Dhū'n-Nūn and Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya in 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat*. First, Dhū'n-Nūn's character treats knowledge of God explicitly and references an emotional relationship with God implicitly, while Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya's stories take the opposite approach and openly discuss the emotional dimensions of her relationship to God, while implying the intellectual aspects. Second, many of Dhū'n-Nūn's stories are much more outrageous than those of Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya, as they discuss fantastical miracles containing elements such as instantly healing wounds and gems appearing from nothing. In contrast Rābi'a's stories are grounded in the mundane, typically involving extreme fasting, a refusal to marry, or miraculous interactions with animals.¹⁵¹

In the *Tadhkirat*, Dhū'n-Nūn focuses on the importance of knowledge of God. In the second story mentioned in his chapter, Dhū'n-Nūn and a few companions find a pot of gold with a board lying on top of it with the name of God written on it. The companions divide the gold among themselves, but Dhū'n-Nūn asks for the board with God's name on it. That night he was visited by God in a dream, who said, ““You were seeking something loftier than [gold and

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

The Substitutes, who always number forty, are a group of Ṣūfīs so-named because they would 'substitute' the divine attributes of God for their human characteristics. See Sadat Ranjbar, *Farhang-e Foruzanfar*, (Tehran: 'Elmi va Farhangi, 1961), 15-17.

¹⁵¹ Such as having a bird deliver an onion to Rābi'a while she cooked.

jewels]-our name. We have therefore opened the door of knowledge and wisdom before you.”¹⁵²

Dhū'n-Nūn's devotion to God is rewarded with knowledge. Likewise, Rābi'a's reward for her devotion in her stories is her interaction with the Real, which results in her gaining access to *ma'rifa* and intimacy.

Among 'Aṭṭār's depictions of Dhū'n-Nūn is a collection of his sayings. One particularly interesting saying is:

Realization has three aspects: first is the realization of God's oneness, and this pertains to the generality of believers. Second is the realization of proof and explanation, and this pertains to philosophers, preachers, and scholars. Third is the realization of the attributes of singularity, and this pertains to God's friends, those who witness the Real in their hearts so that he reveals to them that which he reveals to no worldling.¹⁵³

Dhū'n-Nūn's character discusses an unconventional form of knowledge, which is not earned through traditional means, such as reason or schooling. Instead, God grants knowledge to His elect once they have devoted themselves to Him properly, and they experience this knowledge in the core of the self. Knowledge of God is the sole marker of the practitioner's nearness to and relationship with God.

In contrast to Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya's character, Dhū'n-Nūn connects intimacy with God to *ma'rifa*, while Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya's stories explicitly emphasize submission as a path to that intimacy, while the epistemological elements of that intimacy are implied. Her stories develop the importance of demonstrating devotion to God through behavior, which enhances one's

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 178.

intimacy with God.¹⁵⁴ In Rābi‘a’s stories, *ma‘rifa* results from this type of behavior, as Rābi‘a’s stories depict her as directly interacting with the Real, but her behavior is the focus of the story. In Dhū’n-Nūn’s stories, *ma‘rifa*, and other forms of knowledge of God, are the focus in and of themselves. In each character’s works, this form of knowledge and experience is the ultimate goal, as it brings the practitioners closer to God.

Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s stories only explicitly discuss the theme of *ma‘rifa* in one instance. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī approaches Rābi‘a and says to her,

Say a word to me about the knowledge that, untaught and unheard, came down to your heart without the meditation of any creature.’ She said, ‘I had spun some skeins of yarn to sell and earn a bit of food. I sold them for two silver dirhams. I took one in one hand and one in the other. I was afraid that if I took both in one hand, they would join forces and lead me from the path. My victory today was from this.’¹⁵⁵

Ḥasan al-Baṣrī alludes to Rābi‘a’s having *ma‘rifa* without explicitly discussing it, and when she is asked about it, Rābi‘a chooses not to address the issue. She instead emphasizes that her success with God comes from her rejection of material accumulation and the physical world. This passage demonstrates the main theme of her character: while she has attained *ma‘rifa* and intimacy with God, her practice is the cornerstone of her relationship with God, with all other aspects of this relationship stemming from it. This story differs from most of Rābi‘a’s, which rarely directly address *ma‘rifa*, instead leaving it to readers to find on their own. In contrast, Dhū’n-Nūn’s devotion and practice are tertiary themes, while *ma‘rifa* is prioritized.

¹⁵⁴ Interestingly, this follows the same logic that leads people to emphasize *‘ilm* and studying the Sunna, but the difference in this case is the behavior itself. However, it does underscore the idea that one must maintain proper practice in order to develop any sort of meaningful relationship with God. Moreover, Rābi‘a’s behavior never goes against the Sunna, but instead goes beyond the Sunna. As such, while ‘Aṭṭār is not trying to prove that the Sunna and Sufism are compatible in this work, he does demonstrate that proper practices is absolutely necessary to develop a close relationship with God.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat*, 105.

A result of this difference in approach is that Rābi‘a’s stories emphasize the emotional aspects of her relationship with God to an extent that Dhū’n-Nūn’s do not. Just as knowledge of God is highlighted in Dhū’n-Nūn’s stories, Rābi‘a’s stories highlight devoted love for God. This concept is discussed in very emotional terms, with Rābi‘a rejecting other emotional relationships, particularly marriage, in order to maintain her connection to God. Interestingly, this idea is implicitly referenced in Dhū’n-Nūn’s stories, as Dhū’n-Nūn’s apparent thirst for knowledge of God would have to stem from his devoted love for God. These two characters act as bookends for one another, as they reference both the necessity of devoted love for God and knowledge of God in one’s journey along the path; however, they take the opposite approach in their emphasis. In so doing, these two figures complement one another and form a whole on the path to God.

The difference in these two characters’ depictions is, at least largely, their place as minority figures. As previously discussed, Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya is a woman, and her status as a woman is an obstacle which she must work around in order to gain intimacy with God. By contrast, Dhū’n-Nūn also inhabits a minority status in his society; however, outside of mentioning his race at the outset of the chapter, none of Dhū’n-Nūn’s stories problematize his outsider status. As a result, one can conclude from the stories that ‘Aṭṭār includes in his *Tadhkirat* that race is not an obstacle in one’s developing a relationship with God, whereas womanhood is. Because of the place in society that gender holds and the nature of gender itself, womanhood also offers unique avenues to the Ṣūfī practitioner.

Likewise, Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s stories follow a tradition in Ṣūfī hagiography in which female Ṣūfīs express aspects of their relationship with God through an emotional framework.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ For examples, see the entries on Rayḥāna The Enraptured in Sulamī, *Dhikr*, 94-95; Ghufayra al-‘Abida in Sulamī, *Dhikr*, 96-97; and Al-Wahatiyya Um al-Fadl in Sulamī, *Dhikr*, 226-227.

In contrast, it is unsurprising to see Dhū'n-Nūn emphasizing the importance of knowledge and simply alluding to the emotional aspects of the relationship, as he is a male character.¹⁵⁷ While it cannot be concluded that gender is the only defining characteristic that led to this depiction of Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and Dhū'n-Nūn, it certainly was of vital importance to the construction of these characters because they complete one another.

Dhū'n-Nūn is also depicted as performing more outrageous miracles than Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya. In one instance, Dhū'n-Nūn is in jail and he refuses to eat the food provided for him, even though it was ritually clean. Dhū'n-Nūn refuses the food because the jailer had touched it, and Dhū'n-Nūn considers the jailer unclean. When he is released from prison, he falls and cuts open his forehead. Although blood gushes out, none of it touches his hair, his face, or his clothes, and the blood that hits the ground vanishes instantly. Thereafter, he is taken before the caliph, who immediately starts weeping when he met Dhū'n-Nūn and becomes his disciple.¹⁵⁸ This story steadily becomes increasingly miraculous, until caliphs, who are essentially kings, are bowing to the superiority of a lowly, impoverished hermit, and said hermit is clean after having his head cut open, with the blood vanished.

In another instance, Dhū'n-Nūn happens upon a merchant claiming that Dhū'n-Nūn stole one of his jewels, and so the merchant humiliates and tortures him on a boat. Dhū'n-Nūn maintains his silence throughout the whole ordeal until he can bear the pain no more, and cries

¹⁵⁷ It is important to note that Sūfī men did discuss their relationship with God in emotional terms. 'Aṭṭār himself emphasizes male expressions of emotion in his depiction of Samnun al-Moḥebb, who emphasized love of God above all things. Additionally, there are numerous examples of men approaching God through an emotional framework, such as 'Aṭṭār's *Confluence of the Birds*. The point being made here is that Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and Dhū'n-Nūn are characters that essentially complete each other and provide dimension and nuance to one another's themes. In this sense, Rābi'a provides the feminine dimension while Dhū'n-Nūn provides the masculine.

¹⁵⁸ 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat*, 171.

out to God. A thousand fish burst from the water, each one carrying a jewel in its mouth.

Immediately the merchant and his friends fell at his feet and begged for forgiveness.”¹⁵⁹

In contrast Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s stories include more muted miracles, which primarily touch upon aspects of daily life, such as fasting, to avoiding marriage and surviving independently, or interacting with animals. These are not the miracles that are reserved for Dhū’n-Nūn, who can convince kings to bow before him, make blood disappear, or get a thousand fish to present jewels to him, all of which also mirror the difference in the two characters’ gender. These characterizations make Dhū’n-Nūn’s stories especially outrageous, while leaving Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s depiction mundane in comparison.

Because the most obvious difference between the two characters is their gender, this difference contributed each of their depictions. Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya’s gender has already been discussed, as she is repeatedly portrayed as refusing to marry potential male suitors, teaching men, and correcting the flaws in the practice of several male Ṣūfī masters. These elements are all rooted in the struggles of women, demonstrating that gender and gender-based issues have shaped Rābi‘a’s stories, and Rābi‘a has to use the strengths stemming from her spiritual womanhood in order to overcome the trappings of womanhood in the physical realm.

Dhū’n-Nūn has a few stories in which he interacts with women, and while he is not favored due to his masculinity, the women in his stories are not given the same level of treatment that the men in Rābi‘a’s stories receive. In one such story, Dhū’n-Nūn finds an anonymous woman in his travels. He asks her about the limits of love, and she replies, ““You worthless fool!

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

This story is how Dhū’n-Nūn got his name, which means “Master of Fish.”

Love has no limits!’” He asks her why, and she says, “‘Because the beloved has no limits.’”¹⁶⁰

This woman is operating from her perspective grounded in her womanhood. This statement is an expression of her gender; to her, Dhū’n-Nūn is a worthless fool because accessing the emotional dimensions of one’s relationship with God and even viewing God through emotion is not just easier, but it is this woman’s way of life. This woman was able to see things that Dhū’n-Nūn was unable to see, and both aspects of this story, the seeing and the not-seeing, are integrally related to the two characters’ gender.

This story is important for several additional reasons: first, it demonstrates again that there is a tradition of men seeking women’s assistance in their struggle for closeness with God. Dhū’n-Nūn would never ask someone about God unless they had demonstrated themselves to be learned in the Ṣūfī way, meaning that this woman a master herself. Second, this woman openly criticizes Dhū’n-Nūn, even going so far as to call him a ‘worthless fool.’ Given that women are viewed as lower than men, it would be unusual to see a woman speaking out against a man in this way. This demonstrates that this woman can speak to Dhū’n-Nūn as an equal because she has achieved such an advanced state in her relationship with God, which is not connected to her gender. An implicit part of ‘Aṭṭār’s message is that one’s status in front of God takes priority over their physical place in the world. The contents of the message come from her place as a woman, as her womanhood enabled her to reach such an advanced state. Thus, her womanhood is an essential part of her relationship with God.

As previously mentioned, the woman in this story does not receive the same treatment that secondary male characters in Rābi‘a’s stories receive. Dhū’n-Nūn’s stories continue the

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

tradition of leaving female characters anonymous, thereby silencing them as individuals, undercutting their place as masters and leaders, and undermining their contributions their own stories. While this story gives this Ṣūfī woman depth, by making her anonymous it stops her from being able to stand on her own merit across a series of stories. This undercuts her contributions because they cannot be viewed in the context of her other potential stories that could have been told of her. Thus, this story provides a mixed depiction of women, though overall it displays a balanced male-to-female relationship in the Ṣūfī paradigm.

In another instance, Dhū'n-Nūn sees a young woman while out on a walk after performing his ablutions. He speaks to her, and she says, “When I saw you from afar, I thought that you were a madman. When you came closer, I thought you were a scholar. When you came even closer, I thought you were a mystic.” He asks for clarification, so she explains that a madman would not perform ablutions, a scholar would not look at a woman other than a family member, and a mystic would only see the Real. She then disappears, and Dhū'n-Nūn says, “It was clear to me that she was not human-she was a warning.”¹⁶¹ Women can correct the imperfect practice of Ṣūfī masters, and their criticisms are taken seriously. Dhū'n-Nūn takes this statement so seriously that he treats her words as if they carried the same value as a warning from God Himself. However, once again, this woman is unnamed and her identity is lost. Instead of having depth, her character is an ideal or symbol--one that is never allowed to come fully into focus, ensuring that other women can never attain a similar status. The depiction of other women in Dhū'n-Nūn's chapter is mixed overall, but in general it is consistent with 'Aṭṭār's theme that women can make valuable religious contributions and further Sufism.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

Ultimately, ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat* addresses two major themes in its handling of Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya: the place of women in Sufism and the importance of complete submission in achieving intimacy with God. ‘Aṭṭār’s introduction explicitly argues for women’s place in Islam, thereby forcing the reader to keep in mind the theme of gender while reading Rābi‘a’s chapter in the work. The theme of gender is further addressed by Rābi‘a’s stories themselves, which demonstrate how Rābi‘a is able to transcend societal trappings and find a way to utilize her gender to gain closeness to God.

However, a more central theme throughout Rābi‘a’s stories is that devotion to God helps lead to *ma‘rifa*, or experiential knowledge of God, and thus intimacy. Rābi‘a stories underscore her unique closeness to God, stemming from her rejection of everything else. Loving anything else means that the practitioner cannot wholly be the servant of God, as loving a multiplicity necessarily means that serving a multiplicity of gods. This rejection of everything in favor of God led Rābi‘a to have an intimate relationship with God, and to be depicted as having spoken directly with Him. As such, both *ma‘rifa* and intimacy are integral parts of the message of her stories, although they are not both explicitly discussed.

These two themes are tied together when we examine Rābi‘a’s chapter in the context of the rest of the *Tadhkirat*; primarily by comparing the depiction of Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya against that of Dhū’n-Nūn, whose character focuses on the same major themes as Rābi‘a. By comparing these two figures, we gain both a greater understanding of ‘Aṭṭār’s view of *ma‘rifa* and the *Tadhkirat*’s approach to gender. Dhū’n-Nūn’s character espouses an identical perspective on the

necessity of *ma'rifa* in one's journey toward God; however, his stories prioritize *ma'rifa*, and treat the importance of devotion to God as a means of achieving *ma'rifa* as a secondary issue.

In these stories, both characters interact with members of the opposite sex, and women are treated as making legitimate contributions to the Ṣūfī faith. Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya repeatedly corrects the flawed practice of her male peers and is even a sought-out teacher. She reminds men to keep their ego in check, and each time she does, her male counterparts hold her counsel in high regard. Likewise, women featured in Dhū'n-Nūn's stories act as his teacher or even a warning telling him to be vigilant in his dedication to God. In each instance, female characters' ideas and sayings are treated with respect and they are treated as Ṣūfī masters in their own right. Likewise, Rābi'a's depiction is treated equally to that of her male counterparts, placing her squarely as their peer in 'Aṭṭār's *Tadhkirat*.

Conclusion

Each of these authors, Sulamī, Qushayrī, and ‘Aṭṭār, take a different approach to the narratives of Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya and Dhū’n-Nūn. Additionally, each author differs in their approach to two of their major themes in the text: how to handle minority figures in the context of their works, and the problem of discussing the more advanced states along the path, particularly intimacy. This second theme stems from the fact that novice Ṣūfīs often skipped necessary steps, particularly a strong foundation in the Sunna, in order to gain closeness to God. Each author addresses Rābi‘a’s gender, while glossing over Dhū’n-Nūn’s race. This is because all three authors respond to the discourse that gender hinders one’s developing an intimate relationship with God, but none of them problematize Dhū’n-Nūn’s race because there was no such discourse regarding race.

That being said, each author takes a slightly different approach in how they approach gender within their their works. Both Sulamī and ‘Aṭṭār recognize that women have access to God that men do not. Instead, Qushayrī holds that women are generally not capable of valuable contributions to Sufism equal to those of their male counterparts because he thinks women are rationally and spiritually flawed. Sulamī uses Rābi‘a as the archetypal Ṣūfī woman, as she has devoted herself to serving God, leading her to have an intimate relationship with and unique access to Him. ‘Aṭṭār’s stories of Rābi‘a push for an even greater place for women in the context of Islam, as he argues that women not only have their own approach to God, but that they can also offer something unique to Sufism that stems from their place in the periphery of society. Both of these authors differ vastly from al-Qushayrī, who has a negative opinion of women, and so tends to diminish Rābi‘a’s presence as much as possible.

All these authors also differ in their approach to more advanced stages along the Ṣūfī path. Both Sulamī and Qushayrī write works that attempt to portray themselves as being historically accurate in addition to being a guide for novice Ṣūfīs. They also wrote their texts to demonstrating that the Sunna is not only compatible with the Ṣūfī path, but it is also necessary for one to gain a close relationship with God. As such, their works emphasize Rābi‘a’s and Dhū’n-Nūn’s sayings, while their later counterpart, ‘Aṭṭār, emphasizes these characters’ miracles. The works of both Sulamī and Qushayrī tend to be much more subdued when handling later stages along the path, because these stages are generally only accessible to those with a firm foundation in the Sunna. In contrast, ‘Aṭṭār lived centuries after the debate took place, and so he may not have felt the same need to respond to the claim that Sufism is devoid of the Sunna and could easily lead to heresy. His lack of concern for the Sunna is illustrated by his discussing abstract themes at the expense of discussing the Sunna. Additionally, ‘Aṭṭār’s work is an example of literary art, a medium open to the abstract ideas which are prevalent in advanced stages along the Ṣūfī path. Because ‘Aṭṭār’s *Tadhkirat* is more artistic than historical and focuses on spiritual truths rather than biographical truths, he is able to accurately convey these later, more abstract stages along the path without taking a solid position regarding the Sunna’s place in Sufism. This medium also opens the door to his including stories with such extraordinary miracles that they are practically parables.

Because all of these authors take different approaches to their works, their portrayals of both Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya and Dhū’n-Nūn differ considerably. These differences need to be taken into consideration as Western scholars attempt to depict these figures and describe their contributions and relevance to Sufism. By recontextualizing these figures, academia can get a

better understanding of which debates were relevant at the time these works were written, as well as see the evolution of these characters over time. While we may never be able to distinguish biographical fact from fantasy regarding these characters' lives, we can get a sense of the characters' place in the context of the work itself, in addition to gaining an understanding of the overarching issues of occurring in society during the authors' lives.

This research opens the door for considerable work in the field of Sufism. This work begs for other scholars to continue to recontextualize Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and Dhū'n-Nūn into the other works which discuss them, including Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī's *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* and al-Hurayfī's *Al-Rawḍ al-fā'iq*. This will give us a more in-depth understanding of how Ṣūfī masters have written these characters, and, more importantly, how their narratives have evolved over time. This research could potentially give us deeper insight into the intellectual debates in Sufism during each author's time and also enable us to see what aspects of Rābi'a's and Dhū'n-Nūn's stories captured the attention and imagination of later generations of Ṣūfīs.

However, this work also provides a space for more research that could be considerably far-reaching in the realm of early Sufism; namely: that of the divide between Ṣūfī master that has thus-far been characterized as "sober vs. intoxicated Sufism."¹⁶² This work recasts this discourse so that the two are not mutually exclusive. Instead, this research underscores the gradient between these stages, with every Ṣūfī master maintaining that both are necessary on the path to God. Instead, they all differ as to where sobriety and intoxication fit in one's personal journey to God, and at what point practices associated with intoxication should be introduced to

¹⁶² This divide is typically characterized as stemming from al-Junayd, who emphasized sobriety, and al-Ḥallāj and al-Bisṭāmī, who emphasized intoxication. Mystical intoxication is the annihilation of the self in God. In contrast, al-Junayd emphasized a 'second sobriety' which prioritized remaining in life and maintaining a relationship with God after annihilation. For more information, see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 58-59, 129.

the Ṣūfī novice. Sufism after al-Junayd should be examined through this lens in order to see how their responses to the tension between these two areas within the religion shaped Islamic scholarship and the development of Sufism as a whole. This research will open the door to a more nuanced understanding of a debate that helped shape Sufism itself and Sufism's relationship with other aspects of Islam.

Genre and Early Sufism

These three authors, Sulamī, Qushayrī, and 'Aṭṭār, take different approaches to the narratives of Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya and Dhū'n-Nūn due to their different perspectives on the overarching themes of their works. In each instance, the compilers prioritize literary themes to such an extent that it is impossible to determine the historical accuracy of each portrayal by reading each text on its own. As such, Margaret Smith's approach of piecing all the sources which discuss Rābi'a to construct her biographical narrative proves ineffective; we still cannot access the historical Rābi'a. This does not mean that history has no place in the discussion of Rābi'a, but that history must be held to a higher standard if it is to be useful. Any hope for finding the historical Rābi'a must come from a more careful examination of the texts. The portrayal of each saint who left behind their own works and whose histories we do know should be inspected for historical accuracy in order to determine the extent to which the authors prioritized maintaining historical accuracy. This process, though long and grueling, is one of the first steps that need to be done in order to identify whether or not scholars can rely on the historical accuracy of these sources. Until each work is examined for historical accuracy as a

whole, we cannot responsibly rely on Rābi‘a’s portrayals in them. Without this further research we cannot access the historical Rābi‘a.

However, these portrayals of Rābi‘a and Dhū’n-Nūn are still valuable because they enable us to understand which themes and ideas were important enough to Sufi elites to immortalize in text. By examining these characters through a literary context, which is immediately available to us, we are able to gain a different understanding of Sufi history, emphasizing its ideological development. Moreover, these themes can be used to help us understand the cultural and historical context in which these texts were created, thereby enabling scholarship to understand life during the compilers’ time. Rather than anachronistically reading these texts to find historical truths about people who lived centuries before they were written, this approach recontextualizes the works in their own time, enabling us to gain a more nuanced perspective on the culture during the lives of the compilers.

Works Cited

Al-Makkī, Abū Ṭālib. *Qūt al-qulūb fī mu‘āmalāt al maḥūb wa waṣf tarīq al-murīd ilā maqām al-tawḥīd*. Cairo: Maktabat Dar al-Turath, 2001.

Arberry, A. J. *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.

Al-Hujwīrī, ‘Alī bin Uthman. *The Kashf al-maḥjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism*.
Translated by Reynold A. Nicholson. Najargarh: Taj Printers, 1997.

Al-Iṣbahānī, Abū Nu‘aym Ahmad ibn ‘Abdallah. *Ḥilyat al-awliyā’ wa ṭabaqāt al-aṣfīyā’*, ed.
Abū Hajir Sa‘īd ibn Basyūnī Zaghlūl, vol. 2. 1932-38. Reprint, Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb
al-Arabi, 1967-68.

Al-Qushayrī, Abū ‘l-Qāsim. *Al-Qushayrī’s Epistle on Sufism: Al-Risāla al-Qushayrīya fī ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf*. Translated by Alexander D. Knysh. South Street: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2007.

Al-Qushayrī, Abū ‘l-Qāsim. “Qushayrī: Interpreting Mystical Expressions from the *Treatise*.”
In *Early Islamic Mysticism: Ṣūfī, Qur’ān, Mi’raj, Poetic and Theological Writings*.
Edited by Michael Sells, 97-150. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1996.

As-Sulamī, Abū ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān. *Early Ṣūfī Women: Dhikr al-niswa’ al-muta’abbidāt*

aş-şūfiyyāt. Translated by Rkia Cornell. Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999.

Al-Sulamī, Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. *Kitāb ṭabaqāt al-şūfiyya*. Edited by Johannes Pedersen.
Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960.

Al-Tūşī, Abū Naşr ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Alī al-Sarrāj. *The Kitāb al-luma‘ fī ‘l-taşawwuf*. Edited by
Reynold Alleyne Nicholson. London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1963.

‘Aṭṭār, Farīd ad-Dīn. *Farīd ad-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s Memorial of God’s Friends: Lives and Sayings of
Şūfis*. Translated by Paul Losensky. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2009.

‘Aṭṭār, Farīd ad-Dīn. “Rābi‘a: Her Words and life in ‘Aṭṭār’s Memorial of the Friends of God.”
In *Early Islamic Mysticism: Şūfī, Qur’ān, Mi’rāj, Poetic and Theological Writings*,
edited by Michael Sells. Translated by Paul Losensky with Michael Sells, 151-171.
Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1996.

Badawī, Abdur Raḥmān. *Shahīdat al-‘ishq al-ilāhī, Rābi’a al-‘Adawiyya*. Kuwait: Wikālāt
al-Matbū’āt, 1946.

Böwering, G., "al-Sulamī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman et al.
Brill Online, 2012. Accessed April 7, 2015. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-Sulamī-SIM_7147.

Bulliet, Richard W. *Islam: The View From the Edge*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Bulliet, Richard W. *The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.

Donner, Fred. *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*. Princeton: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1998.

Ford, Heidi. "Hierarchical Inversions, Divine Subversions: The Miracles of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 15, no. 2 (Fall, 1999): 5-24.

Fück, J.W., "Ibn Khallikān." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman, et. al. Brill Online, 2012. Accessed April 7, 2015. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ibn-khallikan-SIM_3248.

Halm, H. "al-Ḳushayrī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2012. Accessed April 7, 2015. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-kushayri-COM_0548.

Helminski, Camille Adams. *Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure: Writings and Stories of Mystic Poets, Scholars and Saints*. Boston: Shambhala, 2003.

Karamustafa, Ahmet T. *Sufism: The Formative Period*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

Knysh, Alexander. *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*. Boston: Brill, 2000.

Massignon, Louis. *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.

Melchert, Christopher. "The Adversaries of Ahmed Ibn Ḥanbal." *Arabica*, 44, no. 2 (April 1997): 242-244.

Mojaddedi, Jawid A. *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jami*. Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001.

Nicholson, Reynold Alleyne. *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*. Richmond: Curzon Press Ltd., 1994.

Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*. Translated by John W. Harvey. London: Oxford University Press, 1926.

Ritter, H. "Aṭṭār," In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2012. Accessed April 7, 2015. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/Aṭṭār-COM_0074.

Ritter, H. "Ḥasan al-Baṣrī," In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman et al. Brill Online, 2012. Accessed April 7, 2015. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy2.library.arizona.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/hasan-al-basri-COM_0273

Schimmel, Annemarie. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975.

Schimmel, Annemarie. "Women in Mystical Islam." *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, no. 2 (1982): 145-151.

Smith, Margaret. *Rābi'a: The Life and Work of Rābi'a and Other Women Mystics in Islam*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1994.

Spellberg, D. A. *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of 'A'isha Bint Abi Bakr*.

New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.